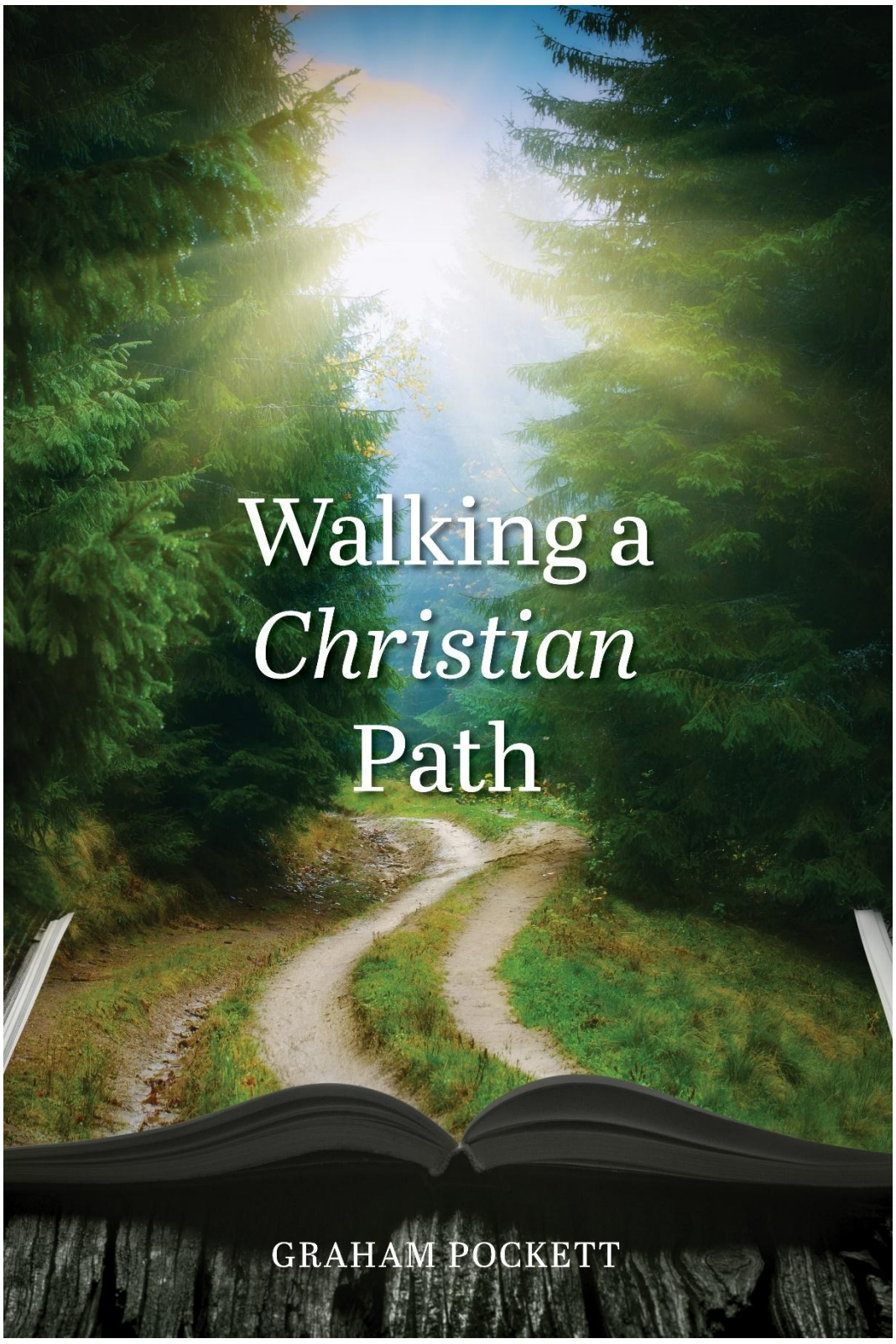

Walking a
Christian
Path
GRAHAM POCKETT

Walking A Christian Path
by Graham Pockett

Ark House Press
arkhousepress.com

© 2025 Graham Pockett
graham.pockett@gmail.com

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any other means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, scanning, except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

The author has made this book available as an electronic publication (ebook) without charge or fee. Notwithstanding that, this book is copyright, and not in the Public Domain. It may not be sold, traded, or modified in any form. If anyone requests payment for this book, or modifies it in any form, please notify the publisher.

Scripture is taken from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Cataloguing in Publication Data:

Title: Walking A Christian Path
ISBN: 978-1-7641051-5-6

Cover design courtesy of Ark House

If you have found this book to be of value, and wish to bless the author, donations are accepted through PayPal to Graham Pockett (paypal.me/GrahamPockett) or use the QR code below:

Table of Contents

Preface **4**

Part 1 – Milk **5**

When We Are Saved? (what should new Christians expect) 6

I Am A Cynic; Therefore I Am A Christian 10

Growing The Seed Of Faith (or it will wither and die) 14

We Don't See The Clean, Just The Dirt 18

The Bible Is An 'iffy' Book! (a look at the conditional promises of God) 21

Will The Real Jesus Please Stand Up? (what did Jesus really look like?) 24

Do You Believe In Miracles? (you do when they happen to you!) 28

'Why Didn't God Answer My Prayer For A Miracle?' (my response) 31

Evolution (a statistical question mark?) 34

Testing The Lord (Graham's Testimony) 36

The Leather-bound Family Bible (Graham's Testimony) 38

Salvation (when are we saved?) 41

The Key To Heaven (an analogy about publicly committing ourselves to God) 43

The Three Crosses (an analogy about our choices) 44

The Cavern Of Life – an analogy of our relationship with God – 45

We Are What We Eat (what we accept in our lives dictates who we are) 46

Part 2 – Meat **48**

Who Is My Neighbour? (featuring 'The Parable of the Good Muslim') 49

'Once Saved Always Saved' (a dangerous delusion?) 53

Bashing The Bible (or 'Scripture Bashing') 59

Does God Ever Change His Mind? (Calvin would turn in his grave!) 64

New Wine In An Old Skin (the problem of legalism in the church today) 69

Are You Hard Boiled, Or Soft & Runny? (doctrines are like an egg shell) 74

The Truth Will Set You Free! (the Father, the Son and... the Holy Tarantula???) 76

Is the NIV Bible Heretical? 79

'Omissions' From The NIV Bible (a look at 17 'missing' verses) 85

Two Visions Of The Coming Revival (a personal revelation) 95

Suggested Reading **96**

Preface

This book contains 26 articles on Christianity, written over many years. Some started out as answers to questions put to me by various people – from non-Christians, to Christians of various faiths and doctrines. Some wanted to attack my faith, others to question it. Some put forward their own interpretation of Scripture to question mine. Yes, and some even agreed with me!

I do not profess to be a theologian, but I am a student of Christianity and, as a journalist, a researcher of the Bible, Bible translations, and Christian doctrine. I have been a born-again, committed Christian since January 1994.

This book is presented in two main sections – 'Milk' for the new or newer Christian, and 'Meat' for the more mature Christian. These section titles come from the teachings in the New Testament, which says:

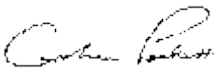
> *In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's Word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature who, by constant use, have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.* [Hebrews 5:12-14]

In the 'Milk' section, I offer some general views on why I am a Christian, on being a Christian, and even what to expect as a new Christian. It also looks at side issues, like the Theory of Evolution, why God answers some prayers and not others, and even what Jesus might have looked like! This section includes three analogies – 'The Key To Heaven', 'The Three Crosses', and 'The Cavern Of Life'. It also includes two of my personal testimonies – 'Do You Believe In Miracles?' (you do when they happen to you!), 'Testing The Lord', and 'The Leather-bound Family Bible'.

The 'Meat' section looks at some of the thornier subjects – like 'Once Saved, Always Saved', forgiveness, and does God ever change His mind? It finishes with two visions which, I believe, the Holy Spirit gave to me in 2009. You be the judge.

There is no reason to read these articles in any particular order – each are stand-alone chapters, and I encourage you to read them as you feel led. I would also suggest that you do not take my word for any statements, thoughts, or suggestions contained within this book. Challenge everything, always. No one person has all the answers, and that certainly applies to me. If a Bible verse is quoted to explain a point, please read at least 10 verses either side of that quote to place it in context. Almost anything can be 'proven' if quotations are taken out of context (see the chapter 'Bashing The Bible').

Generally, Scripture quoted in the book is from the NIV Bible, not because it is necessarily the best, but because it is in modern English. If in doubt, please read the quoted Scriptures in various translations. There is more information about this modern translation in the chapter 'Is the NIV Bible Heretical?'



"Graham Pockett doesn't mince any words, but he writes with a kind heart. If you have questions about such things as 'once saved, always saved', or why so many different ideas can come from the same Scripture, or how much what we see and do affects us as spiritual beings, you'll find much to think about here." *from This Christian Life*

Part 1 – Milk

When We Are Saved?
– what should new Christians expect –

"God didn't save us *for* a life without pain,
He saved us *from* a life without meaning!"

Our lives are a trip, sometimes peaceful but, more often, taken in turmoil. In our lives we travel through deserts, over hills, across canyons, up and over crags, through swollen streams – until we sometimes despair and, in that desperation, cry out to God. We look for an easier road, the flattening of the hills, an oasis in the desert, the abating of the flooded stream so we may cross safely – we are looking for a haven, a peaceful meadow in our lives.

In our desperation we reach out to Jesus and often the problem that confronts us eases, and we are able to continue on our journey again. We expect that all future problems will be eased, but they aren't, the easing was temporary and soon the crisis of our life resumes. We cry: "Where are You now, God?" Some fall away, forgetting that they have already received one miracle, but they expected a succession of miracles. Now we are Christians, they reason, shouldn't our paths be easy, our burdens light?

No, that is not the path to faith. It requires no faith if we are not challenged, if we are not tested, and strengthened by those tests. Anybody can simply accept 'gifts' from God, but it requires no faith to expect those gifts, only an attitude of gluttony. God hasn't promised us an Eden upon this Earth, but He does offer us many wonderful things if we can grow and overcome the barriers against our faith.

"How do we grow in the Lord if we are not tested and, in that testing, strengthened?"

I see this like a mountain of broken glass – a mountain that will be hard to overcome, and one that will cause us pain and hardship as we traverse it. Of course, we could always walk around the base of this mountain and continue our journey, but we gain little in the process. However, if we clamber over this mountain of broken glass, we will find that, nestled on the other side, riches beyond our imagination. How do we grow in the Lord if we are not tested and, in that testing, strengthened? Like our muscles, our faith starts off weak and requires strenuous exercise to develop.

If we walk around the base of this mountain of faith, we miss the treasures that God has for us on this Earth but, if we tackle the hard road, we are rewarded beyond belief. These rewards are not always in gold or silver, but can be other things – like the ability to be able to handle death (especially that of a loved one), or through a peace in our hearts that passes all understanding.

In this world of instant gratification, we expect to be able to put the money on the counter and walk out with the goods. God is not an 'instant gratification God', but one who works slowly to prepare the dough used in the bread of life, to allow it to rise without hurrying, to cook it long and slow so that the finished product is like God Himself – perfect! This takes time and patience. He is not a 'microwave God' but a 'slow cooker God'. Things move at His pace, slowly and with purpose.

Strengthen your faith and strive to overcome the greatest obstacles in your life. As you strive, you are strengthened in many ways, and your rewards that much more valuable.

Jesus highlighted two major things – to love one another, and to forgive your enemy. In the Lord's Prayer, He said:

> *"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."* [Matthew 6:12]

A couple of verses later He repeated this by saying:

> *"For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."* [Matthew 6:14-15]

Could Jesus have said it any clearer than that? He did not say: "forgive your enemy if he is sorry and apologizes to you". No, Jesus told us simply to forgive – no strings, no 'ifs' and 'buts'. He also told us that if we did not forgive our enemies, then God would not forgive us. Period.

Has someone hurt you and never been forgiven? Maybe you intend to forgive someone when it 'feels right', or when it doesn't hurt as much as it does now.

Forgiveness is not a feeling but an action. You need to forgive the drunk driver who kills your brother, or the rapist who attacks your daughter, now – even if they never show remorse.

Forgiveness may not heal them, but it will definitely heal you!

"God will not forgive you unless you forgive others? Scary stuff."

It isn't a matter of waiting until the hurt has abated, it isn't a matter of waiting until you feel that it is 'right with God' for you to forgive them. **Forgiveness is an action of the head, not the heart.** Remember what Jesus said:

> *"...if you do **NOT** forgive men their sins, your Father will **NOT** forgive your sins."* (emphasis added)

God will not forgive you unless you forgive others? Scary stuff.

The other core teaching of Jesus, closely allied to forgiveness, was that we should love our neighbour. When asked which were the most important Commandments, Jesus said:

> *"'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."* [Matthew 22:37-40]

In Romans 13:9, while talking about how Christians should behave, Paul says:

> *The commandments, 'Do not commit adultery', 'Do not murder', 'Do not steal', 'Do not covet', and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbour as yourself'.*

Do you love your neighbour? Do you love the kid who drives past your door at 3am with his stereo playing at full volume? Do you love the owner of the dog who allows it to mess on your lawn and then doesn't clean it up? Forgiveness and love aren't just about the big things, but also about the little things too.

Maybe the only saving factor is that, while Jesus told us to love and forgive our neighbours, He didn't say that we had to like them...

Paul sums up nicely how Christians should behave. In Philippians 2:3-7 he said:

> *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*

Two Billion Doctrines

– the strange religion called Christianity –

Christianity is a strange religion.

Even though two billion Christians from around the world ostensively have the same book, the Holy Bible, from which to base their faith, each has his or her own set of beliefs, and no two Christians, anywhere in the world, believe exactly the same thing.

There are two billion Christians, and two billion doctrines!

Of course, most agree on more than just the basics, summed up brilliantly in the Nicene Creed from the 4th Century (see below), but why don't Christians believe exactly the same set of doctrines? Can any Christian be 'right' when no two agree?

Why are there different churches – the Catholics, the Presbyterians, the Baptists, the Charismatics, the Evangelicals, the Pentecostals, etc?

Is there a 'right' church and a 'wrong' church? Will only members of the 'right' church go to Heaven?

As I said, Christianity is a strange religion. Can people, who call themselves Christian but who cannot agree, be part of the one true Faith? The simple answer is 'yes' – God knows every hair on our head and He treats us as individuals. What is particularly pertinent to one person because of his or her special needs, may not be pertinent to another.

"God is judging us on our heart, not on the doctrines we follow or the rules we enforce."

You can worship God when singing ancient hymns with the backing of a full pipe organ, getting involved with the Gospels sounds of a modern band, or simply standing under the stars and acknowledging His great workmanship.

You can worship God with your head bowed in reverence, or when holding your hands high in joyful praise. You can love God during a Mass with a priest officiating, or when speaking in tongues. God knows every way you worship with your heart, and He loves them all. What may sound strange to someone else, does not sound strange to God.

Christians follow the teachings of the Bible, but there are some parts in that book which are open to various interpretations. Instead of God giving us a set of rules (which many would see how far could be bent), He gives us a set of guidelines, and it is those guidelines which are, themselves, open to interpretation.

God is judging us on our heart, not on the doctrines we follow, or the rules we enforce. He wants our love and loyalty, like a partner in a marriage, but He does not want a pre-nuptial agreement. He wants us to put Him first in our lives – before our spouses, before our children, and before ourselves. If the Bible was a pre-nuptial agreement then we would have to employ lawyers to ensure that we received our Heavenly rewards. Priests, ministers and pastors are not, or should not try to be, lawyers for God.

In Genesis 37, Moses relates the story of Joseph and his coat of many colours, a coat that represents the various flavours or colours of the church today. We place, over our faith, the coat of a particular colour, a particular denomination, a form of worship that suits us. The denomination that we align ourselves to (by choice or by birth) is the wrapper that covers our faith. It is not, or should not be, the core of our faith.

"God recognizes our 'coat of many colours' because He knows us as individuals, and loves us, even with all our human frailties and our meagre strengths."

Joseph's coat was covered with the blood of a goat (a satanic symbol) because of the sinful actions of Joseph's brothers, but our coat of many colours is covered with the blood of the Lamb. Like Joseph's father, Jacob, God recognizes our 'coat of many colours' because He knows us as individuals, and loves us, even with all our human frailties and our meagre strengths.

The one unifying aspect of Christianity is the Bible, and there is no one 'right' Bible – all Bibles are right with God if they are used as a tool for loving Him, for worshipping Him, and for being obedient to Him. The words of the Book of Life have great power, even when quoted from different translations, or in different languages.

If God judged us on the church we went to, on the Bible translation we used, or by the doctrine we adhered to, none of us would go to Heaven because no Christian has 100 percent 'right' doctrine. Isn't it fortunate that He judges us on our heart, not by the church we go to, not by the day of the week on which we worship Him, not by whether we have been christened as infants, not by whether we have been water baptized as adults. These are the wrappers of Christianity, they are not the core teachings of Jesus.

As one of the two billion Christians in the world today, I know that my own set of beliefs is unique. I know that I am often wrong when judged by man, but I also believe that I am not wrong in God. He knows me, He knows my heart, He knows my weaknesses, He knows my strengths. He blesses me when I put my own sinful desires to one side and place Him first in my life.

"I know that I cannot exactly agree with the doctrine of every other Christian, or *any* other Christian, but that does not mean that I do not love them."

He knows that I am truly repentant of the many sins I have committed in my life, and He also knows that I strive never to repeat a sin. That I am not always 100 percent successful is the shame I carry but, like all good fathers, He loves me in spite of my own shame and guilt. He loves me, and I love Him.

I know that I cannot exactly agree with the doctrines of every other Christian, or even *any* other Christian, but that does not mean that I do not love them. I consider everyone who believes in the Nicene Creed to be my brother or sister in Christ, irrespective of our doctrinal differences. If they are not Christian (that is, they do not believe in the Nicene Creed, whether they are Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Mormons, or atheists) then I consider them my neighbour (the Second Commandment from Jesus as outlined in Matthew 22:39)...

> *"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"*
> *Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."* [Matthew 22:36-40]

We all need to exercise more love towards our fellow Christians and our neighbours. There needs to be love between Baptists and Charismatics, between Catholics and Protestants. Any person who calls himself Christian has a responsibility to follow the two Commandments of Jesus – to love God and to love their neighbour.

Do you?

I Am A Cynic; Therefore I Am A Christian

Many people are cynical about the events portrayed in the Bible, especially in the New Testament, and about the miracles attributed to Jesus.

They claim that the New Testament was written many years after the events outlined in it, and were subsequently modified by copyists over the ensuing years. The also say the Bible is 'old fashioned' and not applicable to the 21st Century.

Could these people be right? Could Christians simply be deluded individuals who need the crutch of religion on which to lean?

To investigate these claims, we need to go back to the basics of the New Testament. There is sufficient external material, especially from non-Christian sources, to confirm that, yes, there was a man named Jesus who was considered a prophet by many, and who was killed by the occupying Roman forces in Jerusalem in or around 30AD (sometimes called 30CE – Common Era). The normal punishment for anyone who preached sedition against the Romans (the charge officially brought against Jesus) was death by crucifixion, and that was certainly the death portrayed in the Bible. That much, at least, is rarely contested by serious historians.

Who Was Jesus?

But was this man truly the Messiah, long foretold by Jewish prophets (especially Isaiah)? Did he really perform the miracles attributed to him; did he die on the cross; and was he resurrected three days later? If he was resurrected, then the other questions become superfluous because his resurrection was the final proof of his claim to be the 'Son of God' (part of the Trinity – according to the 4th Century Nicene Creed: 'begotten from the Father before all ages, light from light, true God from True God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father').

If the New Testament account of the trial, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus was a fictional story, then independent analysis of the events, especially through the work of men like Frank Morison (who wrote the book "Who Moved The Stone?" – see **Notes** below) would not stand up to detailed examination. Holes would appear, and critics would be able to use those holes to prove that the story was simply a made-up myth. There are no holes! Events happened as outlined, within the timeframe mentioned in the Bible, because nothing else fits the known facts!

If you doubt this statement, take the time to read Morison's excellent book which details the four days of the capture, trial, crucifixion and resurrection in miniscule detail, examining the events, both stated and assumed, minute by minute. As a lawyer, Frank Morison (a pseudonym of Albert Henry Ross) set out to write an exposé on how impossible the trial and resurrection was but, after an exhausting study, the book he actually wrote was the opposite. As one book reviewer said: "Just like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes – Mr Morison showed logically and diligently that after all the facts have been weighed, the solution that is supported by those facts – however unlikely it may sound or look – would have to be the truth."

"Surprise, surprise, not one word of the Bible has ever been disproved..."

Careful examination of the Scriptures pertaining to this event is consistent with 'truth' from every direction we can examine it. No fictional account could be as consistent as the four Gospels, though each was written from a different perspective and none are, of themselves, complete.

This is entirely consistent with them being firsthand accounts of the same event! If this was a fictionalized account then the four Gospels would align exactly, because no writer of fiction would deliberately add different detail and emphasis to each of the accounts, certainly not to the extent in the Gospels. However, read reports of the same incident from different eye-witnesses and you will see that each exhibits the same variation in detail and emphasis.

Unlike fictional stories, characters in the Bible are not always shown in a positive light – the disciples of Jesus are shown as fools and simpletons, missing the meaning behind the parables, and not understanding his mission on Earth. This theme of total honesty, even when it does not show Bible 'heroes' in a good light, is common throughout both the Old and New Testaments. Again, a fictional account would not show these 'heroes' with all their blemishes and faults exposed for history to examine. The 'skeletons in their closets' would be hidden from public view, as we hide the 'skeletons' in our own lives.

Are The Bible Stories True?

Let's step backwards for a moment and look at the totality of the Bible (both Old and New Testaments) and see what we can find out about this amazing book, which has defied the generations and is still the bestselling book in the world.

Surprise, surprise, not one word of the Bible has **ever** been disproved, and there have been many humanistic academics over the years who have searched long and hard to disprove this book (actually a library of 66 books).

Most of the stories of the Old Testament, originally considered myths by historians, have now been proven through archaeology. Once thought not to exist, Sodom and Gomorrah are now known to have been real places; and the walls of Jericho not only fell down, but they fell outwards (something which doesn't happen during a siege!). The discovery of oil in the Middle East was from the Bible. A geologist read about Moses being put in a basket sealed with pitch – a substance associated with oil. He believed the story and found the huge oil reserves of Egypt...

Try this. Take a group of 10 modern academics and ask them about 10 of the most contentious issues in the world – and they would not all agree about even one of those issues!!! Ask another 10 academics, spread historically over a 100-year period, and there would be even more dissension because public morals and attitudes (like towards abortion, homosexuality, etc) change over time. Not only could you not get agreement, opinions would be diametrically opposed on many issues (and these are all educated people).

Now think about the 45 or so different people who wrote the Bible. They wrote it over a period of 1,500 years and were from every class of society – from peasants to kings. This book examines every major contentious issue man has debated. Consider this: the entire Christian Bible is now over 1,900 years old, yet moral issues raised in it are still valid today! Time has not weakened this amazing publication that is 100 percent consistent from the first page to the last.

"Could this man, crucified by the Romans for sedition, have truly risen again from the dead and still be alive today?"

'Pretend' religious books must be constantly updated in the light of new teaching and changing public morality (like the Book of Mormon), but the Bible **has not been changed**!!! What it said 2,000 years ago is what is says today – and it is just as accurate today as it was then!

How do we know it hasn't been changed? Because we have found manuscripts of much of the Old Testament which date to a period well before Jesus was born, and we have segments of the New Testament which date from about 110AD. There are complete manuscripts of the New Testament from around 200AD. We have thousands and thousands of fragments and complete manuscripts from those early years, and thousands and thousands of documents that either quote from, or attest to, events in the New Testament. Be not deluded, it happened!

Was Jesus Resurrected?

But how about Jesus. Could this man, crucified by the Romans for sedition, have truly risen again from the dead and still be alive today? Wasn't the whole resurrection story simply a plot by the Apostles to keep the myth about Jesus alive after his untimely death?

If this was a plot then it was the most ill formed plot ever devised because the people who supposedly propagated it were, themselves, persecuted and killed for what they taught about the resurrection. Would you, as a rational person, knowingly perpetuate a myth that would see you tortured and killed? I think not, and the writers of the New Testament – Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, James, Jude and, of course, Paul – suffered enormously but retained their belief that Jesus was resurrected. Of the New Testament writers we have knowledge about, only John and Jude were not killed for their faith. John was banished to the island of Patmos where he wrote Revelation, we aren't sure what happened to him after that, and Jude claims to be Jesus' half-brother but nothing more is known about him.

"If Christianity was a lie then that would be revealed from a close examination of the Bible."

The writers of the Bible, and especially the New Testament, must have been very talented individuals to have created, and perpetuated, such an enormous hoax. That they died for this hoax makes it all the stranger – if, indeed, it was a hoax. Normal people do not sacrifice themselves for a lie!

While the Bible teaches that we must have faith, and faith is 'being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see' [Hebrews 11:1], the Bible also teaches that we must not simply accept what others say but must be like the Bereans who 'received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what [they were taught was true' [Acts 17:11].

Should You Be A Cynic?

If the Bible was simply a history book, or an outdated book on philosophy, then two billion Christians worldwide are deluded. If they are deluded then, quite possibly, they are using their faith as a crutch because they are emotionally weak. However, if they are right and Jesus not only died on the cross for us but was resurrected and still lives, then the lie is in the hands of the people who deny the truth of the Bible. I believe that the Bible, as it was originally written, is the inerrant Word of God.

Yes, I am a cynic. If Christianity is a lie then that would be revealed from a close examination of the Bible. However, what a close examination of the Bible reveals is that it is **not** a lie because, as a history book, the Bible has been shown to be accurate. As a book on philosophy, the Bible has been shown to be accurate and is still relevant after 2,000 years. The Bible is the Truth that will set you free.

Yes, I am a cynic; therefore I am a Christian...

Notes:

If you are interested in this subject I suggest you read two excellent books:

- "Who Moved The Stone?" by Frank Morison (1930 Faber and Faber Limited, London; ISBN 0-571-03259-1)
- "The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict" by Josh McDowell (1999 Thomas Nelson Publishers, USA; ISBN 0-7852-4219-8)

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God,
The Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth
and of all things visible and invisible;
And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only begotten Son of God,

begotten from the Father before all ages,
light from light, true God from True God,
begotten not made,
of one substance with the Father.
By Him all things were made.
For us men and our salvation
He came down from heaven,
was made flesh from the Holy Spirit
and Mary the virgin and became man.
He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate,
suffered and was buried.
He rose again on the third day,
according to the Scriptures,
and ascended into heaven.
He sits on the right hand of the Father
and will come again with glory
to judge the living and the dead.
His Kingdom will never end;
And in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord and life-giver, who proceeds from the Father.
Together with the Father and the Son
He is worshiped and glorified.
He spoke through the prophets;
And in one holy catholic***** and apostolic church.
We confess one baptism for the remission of sins.
We look forward to the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the age to come. **AMEN**

(*** NOTE:** use of the word '**catholic**' here does not refer to a particular denomination. It simply means 'universal'. In this creed it refers to the fact that in God's eyes all who affirm what is stated in this creed belong to one Christian church, regardless of race, denomination or sect.)

Extracts from 'Who Moved The Stone?'

It should be noted that the Gospel of Mark is recognized as the first Gospel written and is therefore the earliest written account of the life of Jesus.

page 162

"[T]he Gospel of St. Mark stand[s] like a great rock far out to sea in advance of the distinctively Christian literature. It arrests even the uncritical reader by the granite sharpness of its detail. And nowhere do we feel its realism more than in the strangely graphic description of the last hour of Christ's freedom. This is surely no merely literary creation of a secondary age. Who would have invented the story of the disciples falling asleep out of shear weariness in the gravest hour of their Master's peril; or that touch about the twice-repeated awakening as He returned softly to them at intervals from His communing under the distant trees; or His permissive words, when His personal crisis was past and the peace of decision had come to him : 'Sleep on now, and take your rest', to be followed shortly, as the glare of the advancing torches becomes visible, 'Arise, let us be going: behold, he that bretrayeth me is at hand'?"

page 175

"Personally, I am convinced that no body of men or women could persistently and successfully have preached in Jerusalem a doctrine involving the vacancy of that tomb, without the grave itself being physically vacant. The facts were too recent; the tomb too close to that seething centre of oriental life. Not all the make believe in the world could have purchased the utter silence of antiquity or given to the records their impressive unanimity. Only the truth, in all its unavoidable simplicity, could have achieved that."

Growing The Seed Of Faith
– or it will wither and die –

Our faith comes in many formats. We have faith in our parents, especially as a baby for food, shelter and warmth; we have faith in our family standing by us when there are outside pressures against us; we have faith in our own abilities to overcome obstacles; we have faith in our friends supporting us when things look bleak; we have faith that an idea or concept we develop can be a motivator in our lives (business, invention, etc); and more.

In a more general sense we can have faith in a cause, we can have faith in a hope, and we can have faith in a promise.

Unfortunately these faiths are, at best, based on assumptions (ie, we assume our friends will stand by us when we encounter problems in our lives) because they rely on the grace of man – and man is rarely grace-full. We constantly place our faith in mankind, including our own abilities, and we are constantly disappointed because man is far from perfect.

Even the most sincere and diligent parent will, at times, let you down because they are human and therefore not perfect. With the best of intentions and effort they will sometimes fail.

Compare a less than diligent parent, and we can understand why we have so many dysfunctional families producing dysfunctional children (who grow into dysfunctional adults who breed more dysfunctional children). While this pattern is not 'locked in stone' and there are exceptions, generally that pattern repeats itself *ad nauseam*.

To summarize: man is not very faithful – ie 'full of faith' – to his fellow man (and, yes, it applies to women too)!

However, faith in God the Father will never let you down because you are relying on His grace, not on the grace of man – and God never lets you down.

Deuteronomy 31:6 says: "*Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you.*" (That passage is also quoted in Hebrews 13:5.)

"Testing is there to help you strengthen your faith"

God might not always give you what you want, He may not always give you what you ask for, He may even allow bad things to happen to you – but these are to help you in some way.

Faith can be learned: Romans 10:17 says that faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ.

Faith can also be grown through testing: John 15:2 says that God cuts off every branch in you that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

Testing is there to help you strengthen your faith – like a muscle that needs to be exercised or it withers and dies. As the old saying goes: 'Smooth seas do not make skilful sailors'.

I believe that we are born with the seed of faith in God the Father, and our purpose here on Earth, as mortals, is to develop and grow that seed.

While the Bible may not talk about us being born with a seed of faith, every society down through the ages has worshipped some form of god or gods. If we were not born with that 'seed of faith' then mankind would not always seek a god to worship. That he does is a sign that God gave us this desire to seek Him.

I believe that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is the one true God, and that this God lived on Earth as a man, the Messiah Jesus, to give us the opportunity to be redeemed of our sin – the sin introduced into us by our ancestor, Adam.

Unless our purpose is to grow and develop that faith, I don't see much purpose for the mortal part of our life cycle – the evolutionists might as well have their 'it's all an accident' scenario. There would be no purpose in living as mortals if we were not here to grow and develop our faith. We could have been 'born' (created) directly in Heaven and not gone through our mortal metamorphosis on Earth.

On the other hand, if God just wanted earthly 'yes' men (and women) He could have built blind obedience to Him into our DNA.

Instead, He inserted this 'seed of faith'.

"God says 'yes' when our requests align with His word and His will for us"

The truth is that God wants us to choose Him so that we can be His children and, eventually, stand beside Him in Heaven.

God gave us that choice by building into our DNA the seed of faith, and then encouraging us to develop it.

We develop that faith by seeking God in all matters relating to our lives. The only sin is putting ourselves before God!

By faith we ask God to help us, to grant us our requests, but God does not always answer those requests in the way we want. While God does answer ALL prayer, sometimes that answer is 'yes', sometimes it is 'not now', and sometimes it is 'no'.

God says 'yes' when our requests align with His word, and His will for us.

For example, we can pray for clarity of mind when we are faced with a test, say, a school examination. We can also ask God for guidance when we make decisions ("Lord, if this is what you want for me then please open all the doors wide so that it happens, but if You do not want me to do this, or have this, then please close the doors with a clang so that I can know that it is not right for me").

God says 'not now' when we aren't ready to handle the request, or it is just bad timing in our life.

For example, if a child requests an ice cream just before a meal a wise parent will say 'not now'. And God is the wisest of all parents.

God says 'no' when our requests are not the best thing for us, do not align with the Word, or go against His will for us.

For example, if we have trouble handling money and ask God for a windfall to pay off our debts, then God will most likely say 'no' because first we must learn to handle money. Granting our request for a windfall would not be in our best interest.

Read the excellent poem 'And God Said No' by Claudia Minden Weisz, the mother of a severely disabled Rett Syndrome child. (Included in the article 'Why Didn't God Answer My Prayer For A Miracle?')

"The Word says that we should ask God for everything"

The Word says that we should ask God for everything. Matthew 7:7 says '*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you*' but the proviso is that what we ask is in His will – He won't grant you something that is against His will for you.

If God never said 'no', even when our requests were not the best thing for us at that time, then He would become a 'Santa Claus' God and we would not require faith – we wouldn't even have to believe!

In fact, faith grows when we do NOT get something we want or believe we deserve, but still don't falter in our faith.

When Paul the Apostle talks about doing 'works' he is invariably talking to fellow Jews, because many Jews in those days thought that all they needed to do was to obey the Laws of God to be saved – they did not have to actually believe in Him. Their actions were more important than their belief.

In fact, their faith WAS in their actions, as long as they obeyed the 613 Mitzvot – the 613 commandments of the Old Testament. Unfortunately, without Grace to protect you, no-one can even follow the basic 10 Commandments, much less all 613!

Many non-born-again-Christians today believe that if they are 'good' (a definition would be interesting!) then they would go to Heaven. I believe they are thinking about the Santa Claus 'naughty or nice' list. However, as we have already ascertained, God is not a type of 'Santa Claus' because that does not require faith, only blind obedience.

"So placing your faith in just doing good will not help you get into Heaven"

Of course, none of us are good enough to achieve Salvation through our good works, and even someone like Mother Theresa does not automatically go to Heaven because he or she was a 'good person' or that they did 'good things'.

That's a bit scary because if we can't earn our way into Heaven by being good, then how do we get there?

I believe we get there by exercising and growing our faith in Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. In John 14:6 Jesus said, "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*".

So placing your faith in just doing good – or placing your faith in Allah, or Buddha, or Confucius – will not help you get into Heaven.

While you might get to Heaven by just accepting Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, the chances are that if you don't exercise your faith it will wither and die, along with your likelihood of Salvation.

And your faith can die! As Paul says in 2 Timothy 4:7 "*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*" (See also Matthew 24:13; 10:22; Mark 13:13; Acts 14:21-22; Hebrews 3:5-6, 14; Hebrews 12:1-3; etc.)

To put it another way, the seed that God planted in you at birth needs to be watered and fed. As someone once said: "We are born with faith, we learn cynicism".

Faith is not based on our own knowledge or experience. The Bible says in Hebrews 11:1 '*Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see*'.

We have faith that the universe is huge, we have faith that mathematical theorems are accurate, we have faith that doctors know what they are talking about, and what is best for us, we have faith that there was a king of England known as Henry VIII, we have faith that Julius Caesar was murdered by his best friend, Brutus, we have faith that man has stood on the Moon – in fact, we have faith in many things we have no direct knowledge about.

Some things are important to believe by faith, others require cynicism. How you choose will decide many things, the most important thing to hold by faith is that God is real, and that we are saved by the Grace of the Lord Jesus!

Does it matter who killed Julius Caesar? Does it really matter if man actually walked on the Moon and it wasn't a NASA scam? No. It doesn't.

What does matter is that we place our faith in the Bible as the Word of God, in the resurrection of Jesus, and the promise of eternity.

These are the important matters of faith. Like a seed, that faith must be watered and grown throughout our lives.

We Don't See The Clean, Just The Dirt
– judgement and forgiveness –

Most people tend to judge a person on how bad they are – on the negative aspects of their character and not on the positive. We don't focus on their 'clean', we focus on their 'dirt'.

A newspaper publisher, which only prints good news, does not stay in business long (as can be testified by the number of times it has been tried). Let's face it, we thrive on the dirt in other people's lives – the shame of having Uncle Bob in prison, the problems that people expose in reality TV talk shows (Dr Phil, Oprah, Montel, Springer, et al), the horror photographs of car wrecks, etc.

We get an emotional high from feeding on other people's misery – the lower they are emotionally, the higher we feel. We often obtain our feeling of self-worth from feeding on the misery and trauma in other people's lives.

We eagerly read the juiciest tit bits of news, we listen to all the celebrity gossip, we get angry over yet another priest being accused of child molestation, another nice old grandmother who has been bludgeoned to death in a home invasion – we get emotional highs from a feeling of righteous indignation.

In general, we are quick to judge, yet slow to forgive.

In Matthew 7:1-2, Jesus says:

> "*Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*

And in Luke 6:37, He says:

> "*Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.*"

For every 'feel good' story on the TV news, there are a dozen presented to shock or enthral – but all are designed to extract from us an emotional reaction. The currency of TV news is 'reaction'. No reaction equals no news.

But the biggest potentially dangerous reports are those that encourage us to make a judgement, a judgement which is based entirely on the story presentation. We are given no balance, just a one-sided viewpoint which, through lack of balanced information, we are forced to accept.

The biggest problem with judging other people is that we never have all the information. We make snap judgments on what someone has done, not on why they did it. We focus on the effect and ignore the cause.

"Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."
[1 Samuel 16:7]

We watch a 30-second summation on the TV news about a huge court case, and make up our mind about the case based on that summation. That summation could be slanted in any number of ways depending on the integrity, journalistic expertise, and bias of the reporter or the TV network presenting the story.

We did not listen to the weeks or months of evidence, to the various arguments for and against certain aspects of the case, we simply make our own judgement based on someone else's viewpoint. The news is funnelled to us through a filter, and the information from which we make our judgements is often presented for emotional impact, not fact.

As Christians we should be above that – we should be heeding the directions of our Lord, Jesus, who said that we should not judge others. Maybe if we could get inside someone's mind, understand their motivation, where they came from, or any mental illness they might suffer, we might, just might, have some grounds in which to judge someone. Unfortunately we never really get an opportunity to walk a mile in someone else's shoes.

In 1 Samuel 16:7 it says:

> *The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.*

Imagine if you were raised by a father who was a career burglar, who taught you how to steal at eight years of age, who taught you that the law does not apply to you because 'the rich can afford it' and 'they'll just claim it off their insurance company, and probably add a little bit more'. What attitude would you have? If you were constantly taught these things from a very young age they would be ingrained into you, and thieving would be as natural to you as eating. Whose fault is it when you are jailed for theft?

And what do you learn in jail? To be a good citizen? Alas, no. You are taught to be selfish, to put your own needs, your own health, happiness and safety, above everybody else's. Prison is a 'me first' environment. You are not taught to be a responsible citizen, but to place yourself above everyone else – the exact opposite to what is required for someone to live successfully in a community. Generally, criminals are social misfits, and prison enhances that 'social outcast' feeling.

What do you do with a person like this? Do you try to help them, or do you simply lock them up and throw away the key?

Of course, we should judge the <u>actions</u> of others, especially if it impacts on us or our families. A lion should not be judged for being a lion – it is his nature to stalk and kill for his food – but that does not mean we have to invite a lion home for dinner (especially when we might be on the menu!). It is the lion's nature that causes us to protect ourselves from him.

"The theory of forgiveness is wonderful – until we are faced with an horrific situation that affects us or our families."

The other part of Luke 6:37 says: 'Forgive, and you will be forgiven'. Do we forgive those who have sinned against us, or do we harbour feelings of unforgiveness? What would happen if your wife or child was brutally raped? Would you forgive the rapist? Could you forgive the rapist? Should you forgive the rapist?

More importantly, where do you stand if, say, that rapist serves his time in prison, finds the Lord, and becomes born again as a new creation in Christ? Do you wipe his slate clean, as God does, or do you still brand that person as a rapist and hate him for what he did to your wife or child?

The theory of forgiveness is wonderful – until we are faced with an horrific situation that affects us or our families. <u>Could</u> you move from theory into practice. <u>Should</u> you move from theory into practice?

Remember, Jesus said "Forgive, and you will be forgiven". If you cannot forgive others who sin against you, then how can God forgive you when you sin against Him? (When you sin against other people you are sinning against God too!)

A recent example of forgiveness was expressed when the Amish community forgave Charles Carl Roberts IV for killing five young schoolgirls, and injuring another five, at the West Nickel Mines School, an Amish one-room schoolhouse in the Old Order Amish community of Nickel Mines in Pennsylvania, USA, on October 2, 2006.

According to the Philadelphia Inquirer (October 1, 2007), the "Amish community members visited and comforted Roberts' widow, parents, and parents-in-law. One Amish man held Roberts' sobbing father in his arms, reportedly

for as long as an hour, to comfort him." The same source reports that about 30 members of the Amish community attended Roberts' funeral.

Wikipedia reports that: 'Some commentators criticized the swift and complete forgiveness with which the Amish responded, arguing that forgiveness is inappropriate when no remorse has been expressed, and that such an attitude runs the risk of denying the existence of evil...' (For more information about this crime, read the full 'Amish school shooting' article in Wikipedia.)

Is remorse necessary so that someone who sins against you can be forgiven? The answer is an emphatic 'no'. Forgiveness is about the victim, not the perpetrator. In fact, forgiveness is an act of the head, not of the heart. You must forgive someone, even if you don't like them or what they did.

"Forgiveness ... is God's way of healing that sin-caused wound so that its scar does not dominate that person's life."

Forgiveness does not imply acceptance of the sin, because the sin is still wrong whether or not the perpetrator has been forgiven. Forgiveness is about the person sinned against; it is God's way of healing that sin-caused wound so that its scar does not dominate that person's life.

When we meet people, especially when we get to know a new group of people, or we move into a new neighbourhood, we must be careful that we see only the clean in other people's lives, and we do not look for their dirt. Everybody has some dirt in their lives, but we must look beyond that dirt to see the clean underneath.

How we perceive others has a huge bearing on how they perceive themselves. Tell a child that he or she is 'stupid' and it takes a lot of praise to erase that impression and restore that child's self-respect.

People tend to live according to the way they are treated. If you assume that someone is 'bad' it will become apparent to that person, and they will tend to live down to that assumption. If you assume that someone is 'good' then they will tend to live up to that assumption. To a large degree, our behaviour reflects how we are treated. If you treat someone like a rabid dog, don't complain when you get bitten...

We see what we look for. If we look for dirt then we will find dirt, but if we look for clean we might just be surprised at what we find – even in the worst character, the most vile offender. Ask anyone who works in Prison Ministry.

In John 8:15 Jesus accused us of judging by human standards, and those standards are inevitably wrong because we cannot know the heart of the person whom we are judging. We shouldn't be looking for the dirt in someone's life.

As Jesus said in John 8:7...

> "*If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone...*"

The Bible Is An 'iffy' Book!
– a look at the conditional promises of God –

Most Christians assume that the promise of the gift of Salvation, like all other promises in the Bible, is free.

We are taught that Salvation is a free gift from God with the usual comment "you cannot earn your way into Heaven". Doesn't John 8:36 say "so if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed"? And doesn't Romans 6:23 say "for the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"?

We believe that gifts are free – without any attached strings – but is that true when we look at the various promises in the Bible?

The primary Salvation promise is in John 3:16 which says:

> *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

However, John 3:16 does not say that Salvation is a free gift because it contains an 'if' statement – you will not perish and have eternal life **if** you believe in Jesus! So there is a condition to that gift, and that condition is that you must accept that Jesus is Lord.

This is only a partial statement because just acknowledging that Jesus Christ is Lord is not sufficient – even Satan acknowledges that Jesus is Lord, but no-one could claim that Satan was saved!

The John 3:16 statement is further clarified in the Word where it says that you must not only accept that Jesus is Lord (the Messiah as foretold in the Old Testament) but you must also submit yourself to Him (something that Satan does not do!).

So God's promises are conditional – they are only 'free' **if** you obey certain conditions. Around 1,500 verses in the Bible contain the word 'if', and there are lots of other promises in Scripture that do not use the word 'if' but contain conditions (like our John 3:16 example).

According to my Bible software, the word 'if' is used 1,784 times in 1,589 verses within the NIV. In the KJV (post 1820 version), the word 'if' is used 1,595 times in 1,420 verses. Either way, it is a well-used word in the Bible, and it places conditions on God's promises.

Examples of some of the 'IF' statements in the Bible:

If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.
Genesis 4:7

Now if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.
Exodus 19:5a

After you have had children and grandchildren and have lived in the land a long time – if you then become corrupt and make any kind of idol, doing evil in the eyes of the LORD your God and provoking Him to anger, I call Heaven and Earth as witnesses against you this day that you will quickly perish from the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess. You will not live there long but will certainly be destroyed.
Deuteronomy 4:25-26

And if we are careful to obey all this law before the LORD our God, as He has commanded us, that will be our righteousness.
Deuteronomy 6:25

If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the LORD your God will keep His covenant of love with you, as He swore to your forefathers.
Deuteronomy 7:12

If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed.
Deuteronomy 8:19

So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today – to love the LORD your God and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul – then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil. I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied.
Deuteronomy 11:13-15

If you carefully observe all these commands I am giving you to follow – to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to hold fast to Him – then the LORD will drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations larger and stronger than you.
Deuteronomy 11:22-23

See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse – the blessing if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the LORD your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known.
Deuteronomy 11:26-28

If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, "Let us follow other gods" (gods you have not known) "and let us worship them," you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love Him with all your heart and with all your soul.
Deuteronomy 13:1-3

If you make the Most High your dwelling – even the LORD, who is my refuge – then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent.
Psalm 91:9-10

Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land...
Isaiah 1:18-19

If only you had paid attention to My commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea.
Isaiah 48:18

Jesus said: *"For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."*
Matthew 6:14-15

Jesus said: *"Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."*
Matthew 17:20

Jesus said: *"If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."*
Matthew 21:22

Jesus said: *"If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you."*
Luke 17:6

Jesus said: *"If you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples."*
John 8:31

Jesus said: *"I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps My word, he will never see death."*
John 8:51

Jesus said: *"Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"*
John 11:40

Jesus said: *"By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another."*
John 13:35

Jesus said: *"If you love Me, you will obey what I command."*
John 14:15

Jesus said: *"If anyone does not remain in Me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you."*
John 15:6-7

Jesus said: *"If you obey My commands, you will remain in My love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in His love."*
John 15:10

Jesus said: *"You are My friends if you do what I command."*
John 15:14

If God is for us, who can be against us?
Romans 8:31

...if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord', and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.
Romans 10:9

By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.
1 Corinthians 15:2

If anyone does not love the Lord – a curse be on him.
1 Corinthians 16:22

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!
2 Corinthians 5:17

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.
Revelation 22:18-19

Will The Real Jesus Please Stand Up?

– what did Jesus really look like? –

For many hundreds of years, most European Christians have considered Jesus to be a long haired, blue-eyed Caucasian, while in many African countries He is pictured as being black, with typically Negroid characteristics. What is wrong with these images of Christ is that they are both very wrong.

There are no contemporary descriptions of Jesus, though some people accept the description of Jesus as given by the Jewish historian, Josephus. Late in the first century, he wrote 'The Antiquities of the Jews', a history of the Jewish peoples. Modern English versions contain the following passage (generally known as 'Testimonium Flavianum'):

> *"Now there was about this time, Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works; a teacher of such men as received the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was (the) Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day."* (Book XVIII, Chapter iii, Section 3)

Professor Shlomo Pines, a scholar of Jewish and Islamic philosophy, found a different version of the Josephus description of Jesus in an Arabic version of the tenth century:

> *"At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus, and his conduct was good, and he was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon their loyalty to him. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive. Accordingly they believed that he was the Messiah, concerning whom the Prophets have recounted wonders."*

There is no evidence that either version is true to the original text of 'The Antiquities' by Josephus – the English text version was most likely added by a Christian believer, and the Arabic version was most likely a modification of the 'Christianised' version by a Muslim.

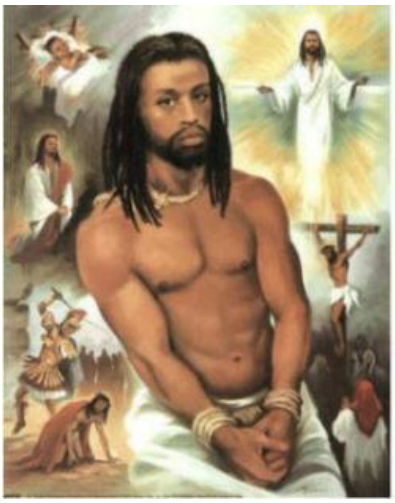
Another source that provides a description of Jesus (as the future Messiah) is by Isaiah, an Old Testament prophet. Isaiah 53:2b says:

> *He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him.*

Verse 3 continues:

> *He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.*

This is an extraordinary description of Jesus and paints Him, not as someone who was pretty or attractive, but someone who had no beauty to attract anyone to Him, though it is clear from New Testament writings that He had a charismatic personality.



Jesus depicted as being both Negroid and Caucasian

So what did Jesus really look like? Was He a Caucasian European, a Negroid African, or something else? As the Bible says nothing about His appearance (apart from the Isaiah reference, and another 'description' in Revelation 1:12-16), we can only assume that He looked much the same as everybody else from that region at that time.

If He had a European appearance (as per the Medieval and Renaissance depictions) He would have looked very different from the Jews of that time, and His 'strange' appearance would most likely have caused comment in the Scriptures.

Did Jesus have 'fair wavy hair and dark eyebrows that met in the middle'?

To examine what Jesus really looked like, we must first approach the subject of His hair length. Most images of the Christ, even with various ethnic appearances, show Him to have long hair.

Nicephorus, an eastern Orthodox patriarch from the 11th Century, quotes a description of him as tall and beautiful, with fair wavy hair and dark eyebrows that met in the middle. I believe it was this description which led to many of the subsequent images of Jesus.

But could Jesus have had long hair? Some say that, like Samson, He had taken the Nazirite vows, and could not cut His hair. Numbers 6:5 gives us some information about Nazirites and their vows regarding hair:

> *During the entire period of his vow of separation, no razor may be used on his head. He must be holy until the period of his separation to the Lord is over; he must let the hair of his head grow long.*

However, the Bible says that He was a Nazarene (from the town of Nazareth) but no-where does it say that He was a Nazirite, even though there is some evidence that His cousin, John the Baptist, took on the Nazirite vows. Jesus was accused of being a 'glutton and a wine drinker' (Matthew 11:19 and Luke 7:34-35) and this He did not deny. If He was an imbiber of wine, He could not have been a Nazirite (*cf* Numbers 6:4).

Jesus depicted as being Chinese

But there is another passage which indicates that Jesus could not have had long hair. In 1 Corinthians 11:14 Paul says:

> *Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him.*

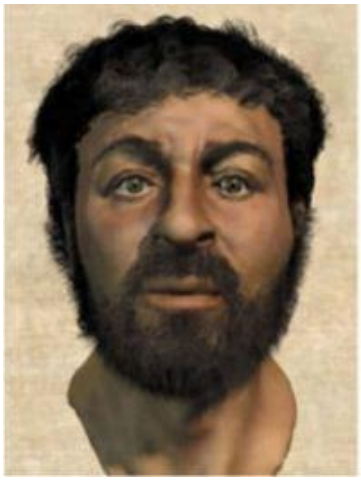
If Jesus had long hair then Paul would not have denounced it in this passage, or he would have qualified the statement to exclude Nazirites (if that is what Jesus really was). There is no way that Paul would have attacked the known appearance of Jesus, by making this statement, if Jesus really did have long hair.

So it is virtually impossible for Jesus to have had long hair.

"Hitler claimed that Jesus was of Celtic ancestry"

So what race was Jesus? Hitler claimed that Jesus was of Celtic ancestry because there was a Roman garrison at Nazareth, and he claimed that Jesus was sired by a Roman solider and was not even Jewish! I don't think so...

It is clear from the New Testament that Jesus was not only a Jew, but a practising Jew who obeyed all 613 Laws of the Old Testament. He was from the Davidic lineage, which indicates that Jesus had at least four black ancestors so, by the racial demarcations accepted by some people today (ie, even 1 percent of 'black' blood makes someone 'black'), He was black. This was most common in the Middle East, and would account for the swarthy appearance of many Middle Eastern folk.



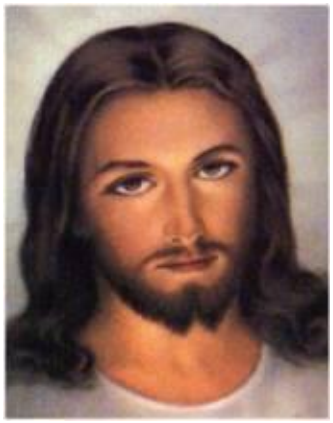
Richard Neave's hypothetical reconstruction

I assume, because the Bible does not tell me otherwise, that Jesus was of swarthy Middle Eastern appearance, as were others from that region. Combined with short hair (and the short beard that was common in those days), we get a picture of Jesus that varies remarkably from that portrayed in the West and, quite recently, in motion pictures.

Forensic artist, Richard Neave, created a hypothetical reconstruction of someone from the same time as Jesus, and from the same locality. This shows a round-faced person with short dark curly hair, and a short dark curly beard. (See **image** on left.)

No-one is suggesting that this is an accurate portrait of Jesus, but I believe it is probably closer to the truth than the European depictions which are so commonly portrayed as being representative of Jesus. (See **image** below.)

Unfortunately, these Caucasian images of the Christ do little to encourage non-Caucasians to accept Him as their Lord and Saviour. It only encourages division within the Church.



Sister Faustina's 'Jesus Of Divine Mercy' painting

I don't believe that the ethnicity of Jesus is important – it is who He is that is important, not how He looks.

Jesus lives within each and every believer and, as such, has no physical body to portray. Therefore, any image a believer should choose to append to Him is true for that believer.

However, when a group decides that their view of Jesus is the only view, that He is in their ethnic image and not in someone else's ethnic image, then troubles arise.

If a group of Chinese believers choose to represent Him as Chinese then they are right – He is of Chinese appearance. If a group of Europeans choose to represent Him as European, then they are right too. If a group of African believers choose to represent Him as an African, they too are right.

Jesus is all these things and more.

What Jesus physically looked like when He walked on the Earth 2,000 years ago really doesn't matter. If He had chosen to appear in China, He would have looked Chinese. If He had chosen to appear in South Africa, He would have appeared Negroid. As He chose (for many reasons) to appear in Israel, He was Jewish and had the characteristics of the local population.

If Christians really want to portray Jesus as He was when He walked on the Earth, they should remember that He would have looked like every other Middle Eastern Jew at that time.

If He looked otherwise the Bible writers would have mentioned it. It is this lack of mention which indicates that Jesus had a relatively normal appearance for the region and the time He appeared.

When He returns to take up His throne on Earth for 1,000 years, I have no doubt He will look like a modern Israeli Jew.

But whatever His appearance, whatever, His skin colour, whatever His ethnicity, I will rejoice in the Second Coming and continue to declare that I am His servant.

Praise be His mighty name!

Do You Believe In Miracles?
– you do when they happen to you! –

At noon on Monday August 3, 1998, I was due to pick up my wife from our pastor's house where she had been attending a woman's meeting.

Running a few minutes late, I was hurrying on a timber path (see below) beside the pastor's house and tripped on a loose board, falling heavily. I am a large person (well, **very** large!) and I fell awkwardly with my hand partially outstretched, but with the little finger still curled into the palm of my hand. I took my entire weight on the side of my left hand and, as I lay there, I knew I had broken my wrist.

Let me explain. I have broken many bones in my body over my lifetime including having had more than six broken arms. My left arm, the one on which I fell, cannot be straightened after it was broken in a motorcycle accident during January 1969. Therefore I cannot 'lock' the elbow and, if I fall with my left hand outstretched, the arm 'collapses'. This is hard to explain to someone who has full use of both arms but the rigidity of the arm as a support depends on being able to 'lock' the elbow. If the arm isn't locked then the muscle alone must take any shock from a fall like this.

In this particular case, the hand wasn't even outstretched but still curled up, further complicating the effect of the fall.

I lay on the ground, unable to move, as the women from the meeting rushed out to help me. Lying there in shock, one of the ladies started to pray for healing, and soon all the ladies were praying. I was praying too, praying that my wrist or hand was not broken because I knew how it would affect my work.

My wife retrieved the arm sling we keep in the trunk of the car for emergencies (I was the one with the Senior First Aid certificate, I was the one who was supposed to be helping others!).

"I was able to see that my wrist had an unnatural 'Z' shape and my little finger was protruding from my hand at nearly 90 degrees."

A chair was produced from within the house and, as the shock finally eased, I was gently helped to the seat. At that time I was able to see that my wrist had an unnatural 'Z' shape, and my little finger was protruding from my hand at nearly 90 degrees. The prognosis, even from my relatively untrained eye, was not good. Wrists are not supposed to have extra bends in them!

With my left arm gently cradled in the sling I was helped to our car and driven to the Gosford Hospital on the NSW Central Coast (about 90 km north of Sydney, Australia), which is the largest local hospital in the area and the only one with a casualty (ER) section.

Upon entry, a triage nurse examined my wrist and stated, not surprisingly, that I had an ulnar/radial shaft fracture. This meant that I had snapped both the bones in my forearm – the only logical explanation for the unnatural shape of the wrist. I sat down in the waiting room until a doctor could see me.

After an hour's wait, a doctor examined my wrist. I had been talking to my wife and hadn't realised myself, until then, that the unnatural shape in my wrist had gone! Amazingly, the wrist was now straight and normal.

"Broken wrists do not repair themselves within an hour – not without something miraculous happening!"

This was impossible. It wasn't just my imagination but many others had seen the Z bend in my wrist – and even the triage nurse had not hesitated in declaring it broken (you don't need a medical degree to see that a wrist should not be the shape that mine was). But broken wrists do not repair themselves within an hour – not without something miraculous happening!

I guess that something miraculous **did** happen!

However, the doctor had not seen the unnatural shape of the wrist and didn't even give it a second look. What the doctor saw was my little finger protruding at an unusual angle and, after a short examination and some very painful prodding, declared that there were bones in my hand which were broken, and ordered an X-ray.

I was directed to the radiology department, where an X-ray was taken of the hand and wrist. By this time over two and a half hours had elapsed since the accident.

"There was no sign of any break in the hand or wrist!"

The report from the radiologist was amazing because there was no sign of any break in the hand or wrist!

Apart from some swelling in my hand (which necessitated the prompt removal of my wedding ring so it wouldn't cut off the circulation), by next day my hand exhibited little sign of the trauma of the day before. Even with the swelling, I was still able to continue working on my computer, something that I had prayed about at the time. But soft tissue injuries heal quickly, unlike major fractures!

I have no doubts that God healed my wrist and hand that Monday afternoon. The wrist had a definite – and unnatural – Z shape, and my little finger was protruding from my hand at an angle which would normally be impossible unless it, and/or the hand, was broken.

There could be virtually no way that someone of my weight (120 kilograms – well over 260 pounds) could have fallen so awkwardly, and heavily, onto the side of a curled-up hand without sustaining some real damage. That I went into shock at the scene of the accident confirmed the severity of the fall.

I had witnessed unexplained healings happening to other people but, until it happened to me, the impact of those miracles was almost academic. That has since changed! The living God did not stop blessing people with miraculous healings 1,900 years ago when Jesus and the Disciples walked on the Earth, and I am a living witness to His great mercy and compassion.

Praise His Holy Name!

Final comment:

I wrote the above information because many people do not believe that God is still in the healing business. Many of the healing miracles reported by other people pertain to cancer, and other illnesses, which might, or might not, go into unexplained remission. We do not understand enough about cancer, and some of these other illnesses, to state categorically that God healed – or did not heal – these people.

Sceptics can therefore point fingers and deny the miracle. Likewise, some so-called miracles are mentioned third hand ("I heard it from a guy whose wife's second cousin said he saw it on TV!") and lack details which can be confirmed.

The reason why I publicised my healing miracle is that it was an obvious physical injury (injuries like I had should not be misdiagnosed), it was witnessed by a number of people including a triage nurse, and I was able to give all the relevant information – where it happened, when it happened, and the name of the hospital I attended. These facts can be checked.

‘Why Didn’t God Answer My Prayer For A Miracle?’
– my response –

The following is based off my answer to a person who had been praying for 10 years for a miracle. If you have doubts or questions, I pray it will help you a little.

A miracle is simply positively answered prayer. In fact, God answers ALL prayer, but sometimes the answer is ‘no’, sometimes it is ‘not yet’, and other times the answer is ‘yes’.

I have no idea why God answers different prayers in different ways except that He, being all-wise and all-knowing, is aware of what is the best for us – and sometimes that is to answer a prayer in the negative.

Think of a small child who wants an ice cream just before his dinner. If his parents are wise they will say ‘no’ because they know that granting this request at that time is inappropriate. God is also a wise parent, and many times our prayer requests are not in our best interest, irrespective of what we may think.

Imagine a man who has trouble handling money – every time he earns some money he spends it unwisely. He goes before God and asks for a windfall – to win a lottery, or to receive a large inheritance ‘to solve his financial problems’. God would most likely say ‘no’ to that prayer request because, giving that person what he wants, would not be in his best interests until he can learn to handle the money he has now.

I know a lovely lady who was in a motor vehicle accident and is now a wheelchair-bound paraplegic. This happened in 1982, and she has been praying for healing ever since. Many prophets have told her that she will be healed, but she is still waiting in her wheelchair. Her unfailing faith has been a beacon to many people with lesser problems.

Her faith has directly and indirectly led many people to the Lord, including my family and I. Because I was saved I have posted information about Christianity on the Internet, and these articles have impacted on thousands of people (my Christian articles are read about 4,000 times every week) so the effect is like a stone thrown into a still pond – the ripples go out further and further.

Would you be content being wheelchair-bound if that meant saving souls for Christ? Would those saved souls be more important to you than your own mobility?

Romans 5:3-4 says:

> *...we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.*

I would add that our faith grows by being exercised, and faith is not exercised when we receive everything we want (or think we need). What faith is required when God becomes a Santa Claus – giving presents to all? It takes no faith to simply receive presents (‘miracles’) but it takes great faith to believe when you don’t get everything you want, when you trust God completely knowing He is doing the very best for you in all areas of your life. That is what strengthens faith.

Ultimately, we are here on this Earth to exercise, and therefore strengthen, our faith.

Let me leave you with a little poem that was written by the mother of a severely disabled child. I pray it helps.

And God Said No

I asked God to take away my pride. And God said “No”.
He said it was not for Him to take away, but for me to give up.

I asked God to make my handicapped child whole. And God said “No”.
He said her spirit was whole, her body was only temporary.

I asked God to grant me patience. And God said "No".
He said patience is a by-product of tribulations. It isn't granted, it is earned.

I asked God to give me happiness. And God said "No".
He said He gives me blessings, happiness is up to me.

I asked God to spare me pain. And God said "No".
He said suffering draws me apart from worldly cares and brings me closer to Him.

I asked God to make my spirit grow. And God said "No".
He said I must grow on my own. But He will prune me to make me fruitful.

I asked for all things that I might enjoy life. And God said "No".
He said He will give me life, that I may enjoy all things.

I ask God to help me love others, as much as he loves me.
And God said "Ah, finally you have the idea!"

Copyright © Claudia Minden Weisz (the mother of a Rett Syndrome child)

A Prayer Promise

an e-mail question from Cynthia

This question of prayers and answers is a big one in my prayer forum. I have a brief question relating to Matthew 21:22 – 'If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer'.

We discuss this verse a lot. There does not seem to be any stipulation carried with it. It does not say 'Ask, I'll think about it, and if I like the idea I'll answer yes'. It simply says that if we ask, and we believe, we'll receive.

I was curious about your thoughts.

my reply to Cynthia

One response to your question can be found in the commentary of the NIV Life Application Bible which says:

> *This verse is not a guarantee that we can get anything we want simply by asking Jesus and believing. God does not grant requests that would hurt us or others, or that would violate his own nature or will. Jesus' statement is not a blank check. To be fulfilled, our requests must be in harmony with God's kingdom. The stronger our belief, the more likely our prayers will be in line with God's will, and then God will be happy to grant them.*

I find it dangerous to highlight a single verse to the exclusion of the rest of the Word. The Bible is a complete book, and a single verse can give the wrong or incomplete impression. From the Bible we can see all the various natures of God – loving, tough, warlike, petulant, etc. To highlight any one of those and try to build a picture of God from it would be silly, and very wrong. Like us (we are made in His image) God is complex with many different traits. Likewise, to simply target Matthew 21:22 regarding prayer is also wrong because there are many, many other verses that show other aspects of prayer.

Finally, look around you. Do you see every prayer answered in a positive way? Of course not. Is everyone's faith strong? No, we are all sinners and fall short of the glory of God. The Bible tells me that if I had the faith of a mustard seed I could tell a mountain to move, and it would. All I can say is that my faith must be very small indeed because I have never been able to move mountains – or walk on water for that matter. Of course, these examples are analogies to say that, through God, all things are possible – even if we cannot comprehend them in our minds.

We are a finite being with limitations placed on our understanding. God is an infinite being so is therefore beyond our comprehension. The Bible is an attempt to bridge the gap between finite and infinite. If you doubt this, contemplate when time started and, if you decide that it must have started at some point in history (?) then consider what was there before time started? These questions will send your poor brain into meltdown because we simply cannot comprehend infinity. You were never wired to do so. That is part of God's design of us.

I pray my few words have not added more confusion to your understanding. We can but try and understand what we can of God's nature and promises, and endeavour not to put God in a box (not so easy).

Evolution
– a statistical question mark? –

Copyright © John Readers/Science Photo Library, Photo Researchers

Maybe I'm not very smart, but there are some things about the Theory of Evolution that don't add up.

If it is true then it should be provable either scientifically or statistically. As man is unlikely to ever prove the theory scientifically, a statistical analysis should give us some indication as to its merit as a feasible theory.

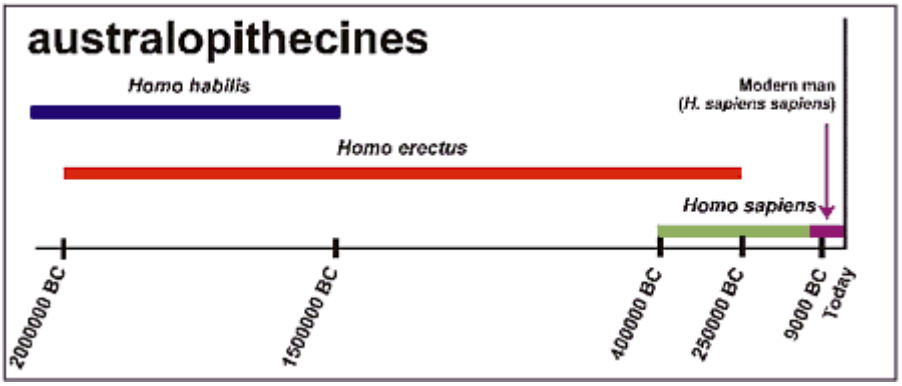
The general consensus amongst prehistorians is that there are three main stages of hominid evolution. These are represented by the australopithecines: *Homo habilis*; *Homo erectus*; and *Homo sapiens*.

According accepted sources, *H. habilis* appeared at least 2 million years ago and lasted until about 1.5 million years ago. *H. erectus* first appeared about 2 million years ago and survived until 250,000 years ago, while *H. sapiens* first appeared 400,000 years ago and is, of course, the only living species of human being alive today.

Modern man (designated *H. sapiens sapiens*) appeared at least 12,000 years ago, and possibly as much as 100,000 years ago. However, for this article I have taken the absolutely latest date, the start of the Neolithic (agricultural) period around 9,000 BC.

As changes do not happen in a chronological or lineal order, we must look at the total number of generations involved to determine the number of generations required to produce evolutionary change.

According to the **Encyclopædia Britannica** (Modernization and Industrialization: Population Change – 1999 edition), there have been two population explosions in the course of human social evolution – the first explosion happened between 9,000 BC and 1,000 BC, and the second after the Industrial Revolution in the 19th Century.

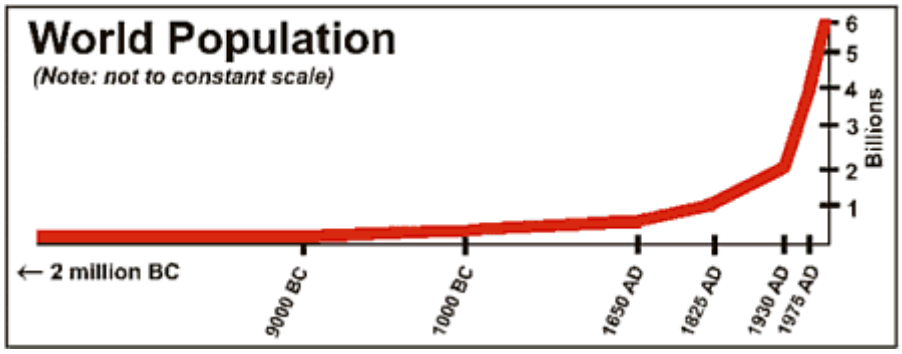


Prior to 9,000 BC the population was limited to a maximum of 6 million people worldwide. Between 9,000 BC and 1,000 BC, the world population increased to 150 million, and then to 500 million by about 1650 AD. Since then the population has doubled at an amazing rate, reaching 1 billion (ie one thousand million) in 1825, having taken 200 years to double from 500 million. It took only 100 years to double again to 2 billion (1930), and only 45 years to double again to 4 billion (1975). It has taken just under 40 years to reach 8 billion (an estimated 8.2 billion in March 2025).

To analyse these figures, we must look at them as generations, assuming 20 years per generation, and then count 'concurrent' generations because, if evolution is correct, it should be the total number of generations that determines evolutionary change, not simply the length of time.

If the figures are correct, then for 2 million years there were never more than 6 million people on the planet at any one time. If we multiply that 6 million maximum by the number of generations in 2 million years we get 6 million

multiplied by 100,000 generations, which equals 60,000,000,000 or 6 billion generations. As these figures are going to get very large, let's just call everything 'billions' so, in our first example, we get 0.006 billion multiplied by 100,000 generations which, of course, gives us our total of 6 billion generations between 2 million years ago and the end of the Palaeolithic period in 9,000 BC.



It is generally assumed that modern man (known as *H. sapiens sapiens*) appeared well before 9,000 BC, so we can assume that it took less than 6 billion generations to go from *Homo habilis* to the modern form of *H. sapiens*.

Between 9,000 BC and 1,000 BC there were a maximum of 150 million people on this planet (let's say a conservative average of 100 million), which would have spanned 400 generations. 0.1 billion multiplied by 400 generations gives 40 billion generations of modern man.

Between 1,000 BC and the start of the Industrial Revolution (a period of 2,900 years or 145 generations) there was a conservative average of about 200 million people, which would become 0.2 billion by 145 generations or 29 billion generations.

From the Industrial Revolution to today (9 generations) there have been a conservative average of about 3 billion people on this planet. This equates to 27 billion generations!

Therefore, from *H. habilis*, through *H. erectus*, to the emergence of *H. sapiens sapiens* it took about 6 billion generations to make major evolutionary changes from a thinking ape to modern man.

According to modern science, since modern man (*H. sapiens sapiens*) walked on this Earth there have already been at least 96 (40 + 29 + 27 = 96) billion generations of humans without any visible change!!!

"If it took only 6 billion generations to go from *H. habilis* to *H. sapiens sapiens*, then why hasn't there been any changes over the ensuing 96 billion generations?"

My question is this: if it took only 6 billion generations to go from *H. habilis* to *H. sapiens sapiens*, then why hasn't there been any changes over the ensuing 96 billion generations? Did evolution stop? If so, why? If the evolutionary changes (between *H. habilis* and *H. sapiens sapiens*) were caused by an outside agency (cosmic radiation?) then surely this would mean that all fossil-dating methods used by modern scientists (radiometric age-dating) would be suspect as they rely on a constant level of background radiation.

Yes, there have been some changes to modern man over the past 11,000 years, but these can be attributed to better food and technological advances. We are taller, better fed, and live longer, enjoying a much lower infant mortality rate and a longer average lifespan. These aren't evolutionary changes but changes caused by a changing lifestyle.

So why no further evolutionary change? Has mankind reached its zenith? If so, what will supplant man as the dominant species on this planet?

Testing The Lord
– Graham's Testimony –

For many years I didn't just deny Jesus, but was an active anti-Christian, attacking the church with 'logic' and using all the arguments I could muster to prove that Jesus was just a man, that there was no devil, and that the Creator didn't care about His handiwork.

The Deceiver had a field day with me!

Trusting in my own strength, I floundered along a path with led me down, and down, until one day, in December 1992, my Christian wife left the family home in Victoria, Australia, and moved north to NSW. I didn't know what to do.

One minute I was beseeching her to come back to me, the next I was saying: 'Good riddance to her, running away from me like that'. Our relationship staggered on like that, separated by over 1,000 km and a gulf which, to me, seemed almost insurmountable.

One day, in mid-January 1994, I was discussing my dilemma with a friend (a 'bad' Mormon who smoked and drank!) and he suggested that, as I believed in a Creator, I should ask It/Him what to do.

As a mark of both God's Plan, and the frustration I felt with my marital situation (I love my wife – that had never changed), after work that night I lay on my bed and prayed for the first time since I was a child.

"What can I do to get back together with Margaret?" I pleaded, expecting nothingness in return.

"Believe in Me!" a deep voice instantly replied, and I immediately knew it was the Lord Jesus Christ.

I was blown away by the voice!

I left my bed and went wandering, my mind in chaos, and 'happened' to chance across a man with a cross in his lapel. Without knowing the man, I blurted out the strange experience I'd just had, and he calmed me down.

He was an Anglican minister – I was raised in the Church of England, now called the Anglican church – and he drew out from me the story about how my ex-Catholic wife had become a 'born again' Christian some eight years before, and was now attending a Pentecostal church.

"They're terrific," he said. "Really exciting. Not like the Anglicans – little old ladies sitting on dusty pews – but where it's at."

His excitement was infectious and, as a representative of my old church, was allowing me to accept the 'Pentecostals' – in fact handing over his authority as my de-facto spiritual leader.

Shortly after I was born again as a Christian, the nagging doubts restarted.

"You've always known you could get Margaret back by pretending to become a Christian – you didn't hear the voice of Jesus, it was just your mind telling you what you already know," came back to me, and I was in a quandary with the apparent truth of the argument.

Had I really heard that voice? Was it just my subconscious playing tricks on me? Doubts set in.

So the Lord proved Himself by testing me.

I felt that I had to go and tell a particular lady, my supervisor, that Jesus loved her – and the thought of approaching her with this comment made me feel sick. Suddenly I realised that it was God proving to me that He was in charge, and that I really had heard Jesus' voice.

But to tell this woman that Jesus loved her? Her forté was public ridicule and belittlement – and I was under no allusion where such a comment would lead.

For three days I tried to ignore God's demand, and for three days I was most unhappy.

"Anyone else I'll tell it to," I tried to bargain with God, but the answer was always the same.

Finally I just knew I had to take the bit between the teeth, and face her. The first time she was busy, and I scuttled away, both pleased and disappointed. It only postponed the inevitable.

Half an hour later my courage was up again, and I went looking for her. As I approached her office, I saw a fellow worker leave and, as he shouldered his way pass me, I heard him mutter all kinds of expletives about her.

With a sudden onset of boldness, I wandered up to her and said: "Don't worry, Jesus loves you".

"Thank God somebody does," she responded sarcastically, and I went on my way, too relieved to even think of following up on her statement.

So now I knew that not only had I been fortunate in hearing Jesus speak to me on the day of my Salvation, but I had proved that God was in total control.

One other time I tested (or questioned) God was to do with the manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

I was suspicious of being 'slain in the Spirit' and had found it easier to fall down when it was expected of me (when I thought that the pastor gave me a little push).

One night at church, about 17 months after being born again, and shortly after I'd seen all sorts of crazy things at a Rodney Howard-Browne meeting in Sydney, I felt the legs pulled out from underneath me as the pastor was praying for me – no gentle push this time. I fell heavily (no catcher can handle a 250-pound man falling vertically) but received no injury, or discomfort.

As I lay on the floor something strange happened – my right hand started to shake!

I lay there watching this wildly twitching appendage, incredulous of the experience, even though I'd seen others do things like this, and more. After ten minutes of this violent activity, I willed my hand to stop shaking (it must have been autosuggestion, I rationalised – I had always rationalised everything).

It took a while for the mental command to finally reach my hand but, eventually, the hand did stop shaking. No sooner had the hand stopped its wild fluctuations, than my right side of my stomach started to shake – not my whole stomach, just the right-hand side!

I then just gave up and totally submitted my will to the Lord's.

The shaking continued on my right side, crossed to the left, travelled to my legs, to my left arm and hand, and finally returned to my right arm and then hand – by then the whole of me was violently shaking.

I promise never to test the Lord again!

The Leather-bound Family Bible
– Graham's Testimony –

The following is an adaptation of a 'Letter to the Editor' sent to an Australian Christian newspaper in 1996 about an expensive Bible, given to me when I was a 10-year-old rebellious child. It was a present from two young women, who barely knew me, and who could not have imagined that I would carry that Bible throughout 25 years of living in a spiritual wilderness.

During the school holidays early in 1958, a 10-year-old boy was befriended by two young women at Benwerren, a Christian holiday farm at Yarra Junction (near Warburton) in Victoria, Australia.

He only knew the women as Christine and Dorothy. They were about 18 years old at the time.

A few months later they sent that young boy a beautiful leather-bound family Bible – full colour plates, concordance, family history, etc. A magnificent and very expensive gift for such a young child, whom they'd known for only a week.

That boy wandered away from the Lord, finally spending 25 years in a wilderness of his own making, cursing the name of Jesus and 'proving' to all who'd listen that Christianity was not just wrong, but evil.

For 25 years, that same 'anti-Christian' carried with him that leather-bound family Bible as he wandered Australia. He even admitted that, whenever he went near that Bible, it gave him goose-bumps!

That 10-year-old is now a 48-year-old man – me.

Just over two years ago I again found the Lord, though thankfully the Lord had never lost me. After 25 years of denial, I can deny no longer – Jesus **is** Lord!

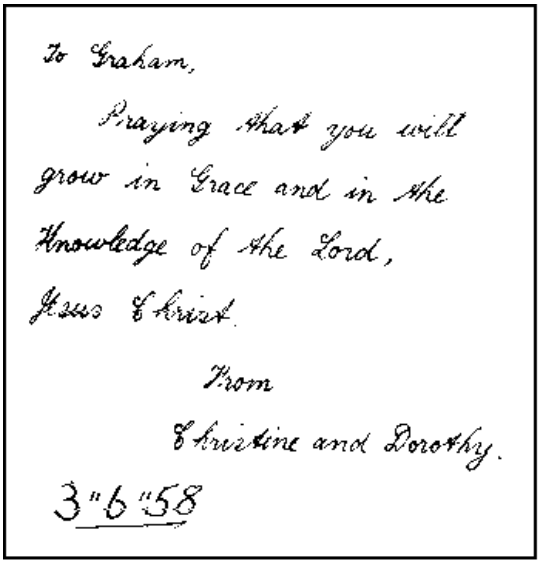
And that beautiful family Bible is still giving me goose-bumps.

I would love to contact either, or both, of those lovely women who invested their hard-earned money on an expensive present for a 10-year-old they never expected to see again.

So that is my testimony, and my plea.

I would love to tell those lovely ladies myself about the feeling that Bible gave me, the lifeline which kept a tenuous link between God and me, even though I was in full denial. I would also like to tell them about the joy I still experience whenever I go near that Bible.

Graham Pockett
April 1996


To Graham,

Praying that you will grow in Grace and in the Knowledge of the Lord, Jesus Christ.

From

Christine and Dorothy.

3"6"58

from the fly leaf of the leather-bound Bible
(the date, 3 June 1958, was added by me when the Bible arrived)

Postscript September 2003

I have spoken to Christine on the telephone, and look forward to meeting her in the near future. Unfortunately, she had lost touch with her friend, Dorothy, so I am still searching for her.

Postscript February 2004

During a vacation in February 2004, I visited my brother in the city of Adelaide, South Australia, about 1,600 km (1,000 miles) from where I live. I said that I would be making a small detour on the way home to see a woman I hadn't seen since I was 10 years of age.

When I mentioned that I had met her at Benwerren back in early 1958, he produced a photograph taken at Benwerren. (See below.) I had no recollection that group photos were taken at that time, and certainly had no knowledge that my brother had a copy of this photograph. Even though there was no date on the photograph, I immediately pointed out two women in the picture, and said I thought they were Christine and Dorothy. I enjoyed three or four vacations at Benwerren over a number of years and it is amazing that, of all photographs, this one should still survive.

I was able to visit with Christine at her home in Callington, South Australia, and show her this photo. In turn, she related how she came to find out about my quest for her and her friend, Dorothy.

She said that she had been feeling quite unwell, and had been looking at changing her diet to improve her health. A friend asked her to help clean up a church hall, though it was not part of the church she attended. It was also not close to where she lived and, even though she was feeling unwell at the time, she reluctantly agreed to help.

When she arrived, she grabbed a pile of old newspapers to put in the rubbish bin when she noticed that there were already some papers in the bin. A headline about dietary foods made her remove the newspaper on top, and put it aside for later reading. When she did look at that paper she was amazed when she noticed, in the 'Letters to the Editor' section, mention of Benwerren and 1958. She then realized that she was one of the two women being searched for in the letter!

An amazing 'God-incident'!

It was an awesome visit to see her again after nearly 50 years, and to personally thank her for that awesome gift.

Salvation
– when are we saved? –

The following is an analogy about Salvation. It is not 'doctrine' but, like a parable, designed to help you comprehend the concept in a simple way.

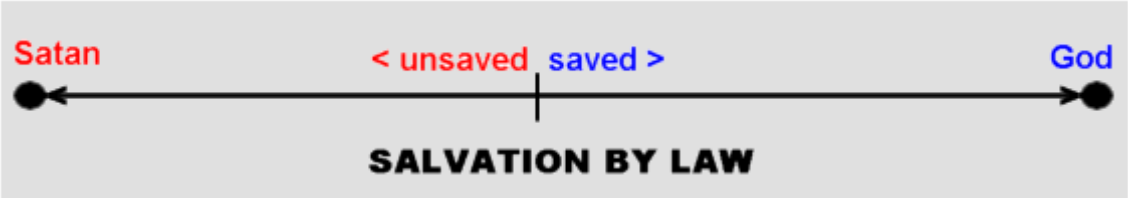
Imagine a line (see illustration below) that goes from left (fully worshiping Satan) to right (fully worshipping God).

Each of us are somewhere along that line because none of us are perfect (we are all sinners, and fall short of the glory of God).

Part of the Law of the Old Testament was to mark a point on that line, a divider, and say 'to the left of that point you will go to Hell, and to the right of that point you will go to Heaven'.

If we knew where that point on the line was, we would do so much and no more – we would have a 'works based' faith that simply required us to achieve a certain standard to be saved (in simplified form, to religiously obey all of the Ten Commandments).

To be saved you didn't have to believe in anything, you didn't need to love God, and you didn't need a relationship with Him.



That, unfortunately, does not work for the vast majority of people because we have at our core 'legalism', a need to know the rules so we can bend the spirit of them without (hopefully) actually breaking them. Lawyers do this in courts across the world every day.

The New Covenant of Christ is about Grace, and part of Grace is the willingness to do something out of love, not out of law (works). What God did with the New Testament was to introduce a cloud around that middle marker, effectively dividing the line into three (see illustration below). The extreme left is still for Satan, the extreme right is still for God, but there is a big question mark in the middle – a fog that hides the dividing point between saved and unsaved.

"God judges us on our heart, not on our doctrines."

Christians now have a quandary. If they try and believe by works (legalism) they have trouble because there is no clear divider between saved and unsaved, so they are encouraged to discover God's will for them and to have a relationship with Him. Because there is no clearly defined point between saved and unsaved, they must strive to be in that right-hand third of the line to ensure their Salvation.

Christianity is all about grace, and grace is all about love. Because God loved us so much He allowed Jesus to be the sacrificial lamb, and to die for our sins. Because we love God so much we constantly strive to please Him – as Micah 6:8 says, to humbly walk with Him.

If we live by Law (legalism) we need constant reassurance, because we can never be sure of the dividing point on that line between saved and unsaved. If we live by Grace we will strive to please God, and will be saved.

God judges us on our heart, not on our doctrines (otherwise Heaven would be populated only by God – even the angels wouldn't be able to stay there!).

If your heart is genuinely for God then you will forget about legalism, because you will be too busy powering on for God. You will also enjoy the peace that passes all understanding – and that peace is the assurance of Salvation!

The Key To Heaven

– an analogy about publicly committing ourselves to God –

When people commit their lives to Jesus and repent of their sins they are given 'The Key to Heaven'. However, you can own the key to a house but, if you are outside and the door is locked, you cannot gain entry unless you have that key with you. So it is with Heaven.

We must have 'The Key to Heaven' with us when we die or we don't get in – it unlocks the Gate for us. Some people think that because they are saved they will go to Heaven anyway (doesn't the Bible say that?) and they go back to their sinful lives. The 'Key' is not being carried with them and therefore they cannot gain entry into Heaven when they die.

Others carry the 'Key' in their pocket – with them, but out of sight. These people are often called 'Sunday Christians'. They are still saved, and will still get into Heaven, but are more likely to put 'The Key' down, and therefore not have it when they die.

The third group are the committed Christians who proudly hang the 'Key' around their neck for the world to see. These people are more aware of their commitment, and therefore less likely to put down the 'Key'. They would normally have the 'Key' on them when they die.

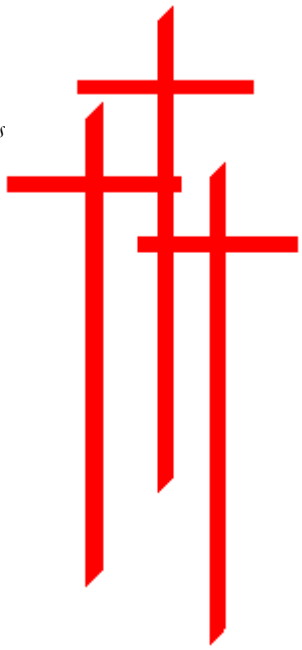
As soon as we receive the 'Key', Satan tries to turn us away from God and back onto his path to death. He does this with subtle comments like: "it's a large key and would be most uncomfortable to hang around your neck or put in your pocket – now that you know you are saved why don't you just leave it somewhere handy so that when you die you can make sure that you have it". Satan always tries to get people to move the 'Key' from their necks to their pockets, and then out of their pockets and off their persons altogether. Of course, we don't know the day nor the hour when we will die so, if we listen to Satan, we are most unlikely to have the 'Key' on us at that time.

You can put the 'Key' down (backslide) and then pick it up later (repent) but, unless you do that before you die, you will not be saved and will not spend eternity in Heaven. The only problem is in the timing – do you know when you are going to die? If you died today, do you know where you would go?

Please, commit your life to Jesus, and hang 'The Key to Heaven' proudly around your neck...

The Three Crosses
– an analogy about our choices –

In the Bible we read that Jesus was crucified between two criminals – two sinners whom, one of them admitted, deserved the death that awaited them.



Luke has the best record of these two men. In Luke 23:32-33 we read:

> *Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with Him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified Him, along with the criminals – one on His right, the other on His left.*

It continues in verses 39-43:

> *One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at Him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"*
> *But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."*
> *Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom."*
> *Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."*

Of the two men crucified with Jesus, one mocked and the other acknowledged his sin and asked for help. These two men represent all of mankind because, like these criminals, we are all are sinful and deserve death. However, some people turn to Jesus for help, and some don't – just like those two who hung beside Jesus.

"Just like the criminal who asked Jesus for help as he was being crucified, we too can ask for help and be saved."

In my mind I see millions and millions of crosses stretching out either side of Jesus. Those on His left are damned by their own actions and choices, those on His right will be saved because they acknowledge their sin, and ask Jesus for help – and they will receive His grace and be washed clean by His shed Blood!

The Apostle Paul said that we are all sinners and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). However, as Christians we are 'justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus' (verse 24). Just like the criminal who asked Jesus for help as he was being crucified, we too can ask for help and be saved. Just because we have been sinners, we are not excluded from partaking of the Heavenly reward.

The two crucified criminals who hung on crosses either side of Jesus were representative of you and me. Are you mocking Jesus, or are you asking Jesus for help? If you choose to ask Him for help you will receive the same reward that criminal received: "today you will be with me in paradise"!

Which cross are you hanging from?

The Cavern Of Life
– an analogy of our relationship with God –

The Cavern of Life is huge – much larger than we can imagine. To our mortal eyes the blackness in this cavern is complete because no light can penetrate from the outside.

A non-Christian stands in that immense cavern without a light of any type. He spends his life blundering about, and achieves little because he sees nothing. There is a path at his feet that will lead him to safety, but he cannot see it. He constantly stumbles and falls.

A Christian stands in that cavern, with the light of a spluttering match to keep him company and to illuminate the ground immediately at his feet. He gets great comfort from that meagre light because he can see the path. It may not be well laid out, or easily seen, but he does have some light to repel the darkness.

If he wavers in his faith the light splutters even more, and darkness threatens to overwhelm.

As his faith grows, his light gets stronger and stronger, and stops spluttering. Finally he is holding a candle high above his head, and he bathes in the comfort that the light gives. His path is now much easier to see, and he has more confidence to move along it.

As more Christians congregate together, the combined light brightens a wider area, giving everyone within that circle of light a better view of the safe path. The more Christians congregating together and producing a brighter light, the more people will join them.

A prophet holds a lantern with a reflective mirror that allows him to see a small distance in one direction. To him the path is clearer because he can see so much more of it, but he is still limited in the view which he has – a view which may show very little until it is compared with the view from the lantern held by other prophets. The more prophets sharing their light, the better the overall view.

"Jesus sees the Christians offering their meagre light to the non-Christians, and cries when He sees – as He often does – that light getting rejected"

Jesus is Light. He sees a speck of dirt on the far wall because there is no darkness in the cavern to Him and, to Him, its size is diminutive, not daunting. He sees us blundering around in the darkness, blind to the beauty that only He can see. He also sees Christians with their spluttering matches, putting cautious feet forward, but fearful of the overpowering darkness around them.

He sees the fully committed Christians, holding their candles high like beacons while they strive to peer into the gloom around them. Sometimes He sees them stumble and fall because they were concentrating so much on trying to look into the darkness that they weren't looking where they were going. Jesus sheds a quiet tear for these saints who forget that they, too, are walking a narrow path in the darkness.

Jesus sees the Christians offering their meagre light to the non-Christians, and cries when He sees – as He often does – that light getting rejected. He is also sad when He sees the faith of a Christian start to dim, and the spluttering light they hold finally extinguished. He watches over all but, as is His nature, helps only when asked.

But whenever a non-Christian accepts the light, and when the faith of a saint strengthens, Jesus rejoices, and the angels sing in delight: "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Son. Praise be Your Holy Name."

We Are What We Eat
– what we accept in our lives dictates who we are –

In this world of instant gratification and over indulgence, we lose sight of the fact that we are what we eat. Eat the wrong foods and our bodies will become polluted, because food is our fuel and we must help the engine that drives our bodies.

But partaking of the wrong things is not limited to food. If we watch movies with extensive sexual references, or with excessive violence in them, our minds become polluted. We start to accept these excesses as 'normal', and our behaviour is shaped accordingly.

We cannot associate with a particular group of people without their attitudes, and morals, affecting us. If you associate with people who constantly swear you will soon find yourself following them in the use of profanity. It takes a conscious effort to mix with people continually, and not be affected by their behaviour, their thoughts and desires, their lifestyle.

This applies both ways. If we associate with people who do not swear, who hold to reasonably high moral values, who are Bible-believing Christians, then we, too, will soon find ourselves copying their behaviour and attitudes.

"...if our hearts or minds are not in alignment with our actions then we are only deluding other people about our relationship with God."

The Bible says that 'a man reaps what he sows' [Galatians 6:7] and that is very true when it comes to the lifestyle we lead, and the things we absorb through our senses. We have to watch what we do and think. God doesn't want us to just go through the motions of 'right living', but to hold in our hearts the concept that we should live in accordance with the Bible.

Discipline starts in the mind. Jesus said: "*anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart*" [Matthew 5:28]. It isn't always just the acts that we have to be careful of, but the very thoughts that precede those acts.

When Paul was talking to the Roman Jews he said: "*And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.*" [Romans 11:6]

Paul was talking about actions alone not being sufficient. We can publicly be holy and pious, but it is what is in our hearts that is most important. If our hearts or minds are not in alignment with our actions, then we are only deluding other people about our relationship with God. God is not fooled by actions – He knows what is truly in your heart!

"It is not easy to reverse a lifestyle followed for many years."

It is not easy to reverse a lifestyle followed for many years. If that lifestyle is a positive one, with Jesus as the example, then transgressions are likely to be brief unless we consciously walk away from Him. Likewise, if that lifestyle is one that embraces criminal activities (speeding, avoiding taxes, not being honest with shopkeepers, etc), lustful thoughts, or other anti-social activities, then we will find it hard to break free from that negative influence.

But it is truly worth the effort. By consciously curbing what we see, hear, eat, etc, and modifying our behaviour so that our lifestyle honours Jesus and does not insult Him, we will find it progressively easier to live that lifestyle.

Besides, whom do you think it better to impress – a group of beer-swilling, loud-mouthed acquaintances, or your Heavenly Father, your Creator? God is the only one who truly has your interests at heart, who loves you unreservedly, even though you don't deserve that kind of love.

What kind of spiritual 'food' are you eating? What kind of lifestyle are you living?

Part 2 – Meat

Who Is My Neighbour?
– featuring 'The Parable of the Good Muslim' –

Jesus taught us to love our neighbour as ourself (Matthew 22:39), but many people might wonder just who is a 'neighbour'.

In Luke 10:25-29, Jesus is confronted by an expert in the law: "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

When Jesus asked him what was written in the Law, and how did this expert understand its interpretation, the man said: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'"

Jesus agreed, but the man persisted in trying to trick Jesus by asking: "And who is my neighbour?"

The answer that Jesus gave was a parable, commonly called 'The Parable of the Good Samaritan' (Luke 10:30-37).

This is the story of a traveller who was robbed and left for dead by his attackers. A priest saw the man but passed by on the other side of the road, presumably in order to maintain ritual purity. A Levite also refused to assist the beaten, half-dead traveller. Finally, a passing Samaritan stopped and gave assistance, going beyond even the normal assistance by offering to cover the expenses for the man as he recovered in a local inn.

What is often missed by modern readers of this story is the deep hatred that Jews felt for Samaritans in those days, and it is worth quickly looking at the cause of that hatred to place the parable in context.

"the tolerance that Jesus showed to Samaritans must have annoyed orthodox Jewry"

Samaritans lived in a kingdom in northern Israel (central Palestine) called Samaria. They were a group of Jews whom had broken from orthodox Jewry during the 6th Century BC, and constructed a temple on the mountain, Gerizim. They married non-Jews, and were considered 'half Jews', or of a 'mixed race'. Like most break-away groups throughout history, they were intensely disliked by the group of people they had left.

While they were hated by the average Jew during the First Century, it is interesting to note that Jesus and His disciples quite often went through Samaria, and interacted with the Samaritans. There is the story about Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:4-42). In fact, that story finishes with the comment that many Samaritans became believers.

The tolerance that Jesus showed to Samaritans must have annoyed orthodox Jewry, especially the ruling Priests, and I feel sure that this played a major role in their decision to convince the Romans to kill Him.

Today we use the word 'Samaritan' in association with charitable groups, but there is still a group of people who call themselves Samaritans, and claim to follow the ancient worship.

When Jesus spoke of the 'Good Samaritan' He was citing an example of a group of people hated by those in His audience but, if He was telling that parable today, would it be 'The Parable of the Good Muslim', or 'The Parable of the Good Jehovah's Witness'?

If Jesus was teaching in a Muslim country (remember, He taught in places like Samaria so His message wasn't just for one group of people, but for everyone) He possibly would tell 'The Parable of the Good American', or even 'The Parable of the Good Southern Baptist'.

Here are some versions of the parable as Jesus might tell them today:

The Parable of the Good Muslim

> A Jew was going from Jerusalem to the Gaza Strip when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A rabbi happened to be going down the same road but, when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Muslim came where the man was and, when he saw him, he took pity on him. He gave the man first aid, dressing his wounds and stopping the bleeding. As soon as he was able to travel, he took him to a nearby hospital. "Look after him," he told, "and when I return, I will pay for any extra expense you may have."

The Parable of the Good American

> A Sunni Muslim was traveling from Damascus to Baghdad when he was attacked by thieves. They stole his wallet and his watch, beat him, and went on their way, leaving him half dead. An Iman happened to be going down the same road but, when he saw the man, passed by on the other side. So too a Shi'a Muslim passed by on the other side of the road, ignoring him. But an American saw the man, and took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds. Then he put the man on the backseat of his SVU and, ignoring the blood that stained his seats, took him to the nearest hospital. The next day he took out money to pay for his hospitalization. "Look after him," he told the hospital staff, "and when I return, I will pay for any extra expense you may have."

The Parable of the Good Biker

> A businessman was going from Manhattan Island to Newark when he was mugged. He was robbed, beaten severely, and left in the gutter, half dead. A Baptist preacher happened to be going down the same road but, when he saw the man, passed by on the other side. So too a Muslim passed by on the other side of the road, ignoring him. But a huge tattooed biker saw the man and took pity on him. He made him comfortable and called an ambulance. He then followed it to the hospital. "Look after him," he told the hospital staff, "and when I return, I will pay for any extra expense you may have."

The parable that Jesus told should have been called 'The Parable of the Good Acts of a Samaritan' because He was talking about how we should behave towards our neighbours (our acts of faith – James 2:14-26) rather than how righteous we are (or should be). You can do good acts and still be a sinner. The Samaritan in the story that Jesus told was not described as 'righteous' or sin free, but an ordinary person who did a kind deed for a neighbour whom, most likely, hated him.

Therefore, we could also have 'The Parable of the Good Abortionist', 'The Parable of the Good Child Molester', 'The Parable of the Good Bank Robber', and 'The Parable of the Good Serial Killer' because, like us, they are simply sinners whom (I hope) still do good deeds for their fellow man. Although these are of moral origin, the perspective is the same as the cultural or racial examples we more commonly see.

A bank robber is not a bank robber 24/7 – at most times he is probably a 'normal' person who does the same types of things as other 'normal' people (takes his mother shopping, helps out a neighbour in distress, etc). We love to categorize people and put them into little boxes, but we ignore the complexity of the human spirit. While we might deplore the acts of a bank robber (ie, robbing a bank), they are still our neighbours, and we are commanded to love them.

In Matthew 5:28 Jesus reminds us there is no difference between someone who commits a 'minor' sin (a man who ogles a woman who is not his wife) and someone who commits a 'major' sin (to follow the example, a man who violently rapes that woman). Each of the people in the example above (the abortionist, the child molester, the bank robber, etc) are our neighbours, even though they don't always act in a 'neighbourly' way towards us.

Should you judge them? Would you see past the sin and love the sinner – as Jesus taught!

"the neighbour that Jesus talked about was anybody who is around us ... They are everybody who lives on our planet!"

As you can see from those examples, the neighbour that Jesus talked about was anybody who is around us – the people who live in our street, the people who live in our neighbourhood, the people who live in our city, the people who live in our county or municipality or parish, the people who live in our state or province, the people who live in our country. They are everybody who lives on our planet!

They are the people we like, and the people we don't like.

They are people who have a different cultural upbringing to us, have a different skin colour, a different shape to their eyes, a different language, a different belief system.

They are also, like us, sinners.

Like them or not, we are told to love our neighbours – and loving someone also implies forgiving them when they offend against us, or against our ideals or beliefs.

Always remember that Jesus told us that, if we don't forgive people who offend against us, then we cannot expect God to forgive us when we sin (Matthew 6:14-15). He also said that he who is without sin should cast the first stone (John 8:7).

If you are sinless then you have a right to criticize the sins of others. However, Paul summed it up nicely by stating that we are all sinners and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

Next time you see someone who looks or acts a little differently from you, who might have a strange haircut, who might not believe in the things that you believe in, then remember that they are your neighbour and you must not judge them, or criticize them, but love them unconditionally.

Let non-Christians see the light of Jesus shining forth from you; loving them, respecting them, and not judging them.

It's a challenge, but all things are possible for those who love the Lord.

Was Jesus a 'Religious Lawyer' Too?

an e-mail question from Tom

I enjoy thinking of the parable as that of the 'good Muslim'. Jesus is so clever in dealing with the religious lawyer. If he were here today, I expect He'd trick me into seeing the humanity in my minority neighbours, despite my base instincts.

my reply to Tom

Why must it be a 'trick' if someone is showing you the humanity in your 'minority neighbours', despite your base instincts? Maybe your 'instincts' are wrong, or mislead...

Jesus taught that we must (not 'should' but 'must') forgive people who offend against us – not just once, not just twice but, as He is quoted in Matthew 18:21-22, 'seventy-seven times'. He also said, in verse 35, said that you must 'forgive your brother from your heart'.

Are there bad Muslims? Of course. Are there equally bad Christians, Buddhists, neo-Nazis, and tax accountants? Of course. This isn't about one group being bad, but about bad individuals in the world. Even so, Jesus still said that we must forgive those bad individuals, not just once but 77 times (ie indefinitely).

We are **all** sinners who fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), and all sin is the same in God's eyes (sin is sin – there are no gradients of sin). Therefore, in God's eyes, the man who cheats on his income tax is just as guilty as the mass murderer, the driver who deliberately speeds is as guilty as the child molester. It is mankind who allocates degrees of sin, not God.

So, in God's eyes, both you and I are just as guilty as those people responsible for 9/11, as the 'Son of Sam', and as Adolf Hitler. Like all sinners, we have the sacrifice on the cross to cleanse our sins if we accept Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, and follow what God requires of us (as per Micah 6:8).

Just don't forget that you will receive the same degree of forgiveness from God for your sins, as you forgive others for theirs!

‘Once Saved Always Saved’
– a dangerous delusion? –

The following information relates to the belief that, once saved, a Christian cannot ‘lose’ his Salvation. This is often called ‘Eternal Security’, the opposite to which is sometimes called ‘Conditional Security’.

Can you lose your Salvation?

Many people fervently believe that, once saved, they can never lose their Salvation. I pray that those who do believe it will read the following with an open heart and an open mind. Above all, I urge every reader to check each Scripture presented – and then check the context that the Scriptures are quoted in by reading at least ten verses before, and ten verses after.

I sincerely believe the ‘once saved always saved’ concept to be wrong. The implication that once someone becomes a ‘real’ Christian (a definition would be handy) they are saved, and they can’t backslide or commit a sin which would rob them of that inheritance.

From my experience, Christians **can** sin and they often **do** sin, but to believe that a Christian can live any way he or she likes, and still be saved, is dangerous. Some argue that a ‘real’ Christian wouldn’t commit these sins, and it is the ‘almost Christians’ who fall foul of this type of entrapment from the enemy. I believe that would be wrong too. Committed Christians sin for all sorts of reasons, and we are only saved by God’s amazing grace, not our level of commitment. God knows our true heart!

If a Christian sins maliciously (deliberately breaks laws for his or her own advantage – say purchasing goods known, or strongly suspected, of being stolen) that is quite different from accidentally sinning – something we all do constantly.

God knows our true intention. We might be able to fool a police officer that we sinned accidentally, but God knows the real truth. I believe that if we deliberately go against the direction given by Jesus (who, you will remember, said to obey the laws of the land) then we must suffer the consequences – and that might mean the loss of eternal life. At least our Judge, while tough, is fair and understanding!

Let’s look at this Scripturally

Jesus understood that when people heard the word of God they would react in different ways – from total rejection to total acceptance. He explained it in ‘The Parable Of The Sower’. I have quoted the Matthew 13:3-23 Scripture here, but the same parable can also be found in Mark 4:1-20 and Luke 8:4-15.

Matthew 13:3-9 says:

> *Then [Jesus] told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed.*
> *As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.*
> *Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop – a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.*
> *He who has ears, let him hear.”*

The Disciples wanted to know what this parable meant and Jesus explained.

Matthew 13:18-23 says:

> *“Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the Kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path.*
> *The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.*
> *The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life, and the*

deceitfulness of wealth, choke it, making it unfruitful.
But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

For people who believe that 'once saved, always saved' I rhetorically ask: how do you relate your beliefs to Matthew 13: 20-21? If a man cannot lose his Salvation, then why would Jesus say: "When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away"?

The key to how we are saved is in John 3:16:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

I understand that the word 'believes' in the Greek is an on-going verb (this is not so easy to determine because Greek is a contextual language). It really says that unless we keep on believing in Him we **will** perish and **not** have everlasting life. We are saved by grace as long as we keep on believing in Him. Let's check another Scripture.

Mark 13:13 says:

[Jesus said] *"All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved."*

Look again at the second half of that sentence. Jesus is saying that to be saved you must stand firm (for Him) until you die. Conversely, He is therefore saying that those who do **not** stand firm will **not** be saved! Notice that I am not quoting Paul or any other Apostle or Disciple, but the Son of God Himself.

Was I saved when I was cursing God?

When I was quite young I gave myself to the Lord. I then drifted away from the church – and from Jesus – and ended up walking in a wilderness for 25 years. For 25 years I cursed Jesus and fought against Christianity. I 'studied' the Bible looking for 'wrongness' in it, and read as many anti-Christian writings as I could. I became an intellectually strong anti-Christian and could debate, and win, with committed Christians in many areas, especially on early church history. Guess you could say that I was like Saul, a zealot against the Christians.

One day, in the fit of despair after being separated from my wife of 19 years, I asked 'the Creator' (my concept at that time) how I could get her back. I heard an audible voice (which I instantly knew to be Jesus) say: "Believe in Me". It was mind blowing to say the least. I can understand the confusion Saul must have felt when he was slam-dunked to the ground by the very person he was persecuting. It was the same with me.

Was I 'saved' during those 25 years of anti-Christian 'preaching'? From my own heart I can say a resounding **NO**. If I had died and gone to Heaven during that period, I would have screamed to be taken to Hell! Yet I had accepted Jesus at a *Youth For Christ* rally when I was about 14. Saved forever, or not saved forever?

To the people who would say that I really wasn't saved when I was young, I just point them back to John 3:16. I **did** believe in the Salvation of Jesus in those early days – I witnessed at school, I was very much involved with my local church, I even wanted to become a minister of religion when I grew up!

But, after five years, I backslid – and not just a little way either! I fell all the way into the pit and Satan had me fully in his grasp. Saved? No way. The Lord gave us the power of freewill, and I had exercised mine to be a servant of Satan.

The final proof...

"We have nothing of our own but our will. It is the only thing which God has so placed in our own power that we can make an offering of it to Him." St John Vianney (The Curé d'Ars – 1786-1859)

If God didn't want us to be able to choose He would not have given us the gift of freewill. It is this gift which places us above the animals. It is this gift which allows us to choose to either worship God, or not worship God. It is this gift, and only this gift, which allows us to truly love Him like a son. It is this gift which **proves** that 'once saved, always saved' must be wrong.

If we are saved in spite of ourselves then there is no freewill. If there is no freewill then the Bible is wrong!

I don't believe that the Bible is wrong...

Before you say that we are saved by Grace and not by works you should know that I agree with you (however, in James 2:14-26 it says that faith without deeds is useless).

Before you say that God does not take back a gift He has so freely offered you should know that I agree with you (however, I believe that God allows us to give back that gift).

Before you say that we are all sinners, and will therefore continue to sin throughout our lives, you should know that I agree with you (but it is the attitude we have towards our sinning – what is really in our hearts – that is more important).

Before you accuse me of being wrong, you should know that I agree with you (only Jesus had perfect doctrine, the rest of us must rely on God not to judge us on our imperfect doctrine).

As Christians we should remember that the enemy is not other Christians – whatever we think of their doctrine – but Satan. Let's keep the focus where it belongs, and not let Satan divert us so we are fighting amongst ourselves. Debate is healthy, argument is not...

Answer to a sceptic

part of an e-mail reply to a supporter of the 'Once saved...' doctrine

I can understand exactly how you feel about giving up/losing your Salvation. It is as abhorrent to me as it is to you.

However, that is not how the vast majority of Christians feel. Stand outside some churches and ask the parishioners if they **know** where they'll go when they die, and you'll receive comments ranging from a timid "I don't know" to "I hope it is Heaven" to a positive "I know I'm going to Heaven". It is people in the first two categories who are susceptible to the problems of believing that, once saved, they are always saved (OSAS).

What happens if they suicide? Would they still be saved then? Of course not, the Word is quite clear on that issue. Unless they could repent after they had committed murder (quite hard if you suicide!), they would not be saved, irrespective of any past commitment to the Lord Jesus. (***cf.*** Exodus 20:13; Matt 5:17-21; Matt 15:18-20; Matt 19:18; Rom 1:18-32; Rom 13:9; James 2:10-11; and many more).

Rather than continually seeking God's presence, many Christians are happy to go along their own way – 'religiously' going to church each week in the mistaken belief that they will be automatically saved.

If their church supports the concept of OSAS they could well feel that they could behave in any way they like, and still be saved. I don't believe they would be. Are they a Christian at this time? Maybe, maybe not, but if they think they are, and if they are taught OSAS, then maybe they never will learn to fear God (as the Bible says quite clearly that we must – *cf.* Luke 12:5; Acts 9:31; Acts 10:34-35; Acts 19:17; Rom 3:18; 2Cor 5:11; 2Cor 7:15; Phil 2:12; Heb 11:7; 1Pet 1:17; 1Pet 2:17; and many more).

It is this healthy fear of God which puts the concept of 'grace' in context. We have His grace in our lives, but we also must have this reverence, this fear, this respect for God too – '*Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come. Worship Him who made the heavens, the Earth, the sea, and the springs of water.*' [Revelation 14:7]

I know that I have probably not changed your mind one iota, but I am pleased that you have read this far. Maybe, in time to come, someone else will say something, or the Lord will talk to your spirit on this issue, and you will see the light and abandon this dangerous doctrine. Dangerous for you? Probably not because of your deep commitment, but dangerous to someone who doesn't already have that relationship with the Father, and thinks that he/she can behave in any way they like and still be saved.

Do we earn Salvation?

an e-mail comment from a supporter of the 'Once saved...' doctrine

What convinced me of the position of eternal security was that Salvation is always a God thing.

My works, or bad works if you will, would seem to be incapable of cancelling out God's grace, and the eternal life that comes with it. If my works played any part of my Salvation, whether earning it or losing it, then, as Paul said, grace would no longer be grace.

If we, as Christians, are given eternal life when we accept Christ into our lives as Lord and Saviour, then losing it would imply that it wasn't eternal to begin with.

my reply

For some strange reason, many pro-OSAS people seem to think that all anti-OSAS people believe they must do good works to be saved. A particular segment of the liturgical church may, in part, believe this, but no Bible-believing, and Bible-reading, Christian would. Salvation is by grace, and grace alone. We are not worthy and we cannot earn it. Period.

Salvation is God's gift to EVERYBODY, not just Christians, but we have the right to refuse that gift, or to return it. Jesus died on the cross for all of mankind, not just for Christians.

I could offer you a $5 note and you could (a) reject it outright; (b) accept it, and then hand it back; or (c) accept it and keep it. That does not alter the original value of the gift, but it does alter what you do with it.

Non-Christians do not accept that gift because they do not understand it. Imagine a primitive man, who used conch shells for currency, being offered a $5 note – he would not see its value and would probably use it to light a fire (if he realized that it had even that much worth!).

Christians know the value of the gift because we are told of it in the Bible. Therefore we can accept or reject it – and, in our knowledge, if we reject it then we face eternal damnation. However, that is a decision we make.

The gift of Salvation still exists, still has value, but its value is dependent upon it being accepted and kept.

So we do not 'earn' our Salvation by doing things (works), but we must accept the gift and keep it until we die (as Paul says, run the race until it is finished).

When Are We Saved?

an e-mail question from John

OK, on the issue of OSAS, I don't believe in works for Salvation, it is by grace and is a gift of God. But, I don't think that a Christian can live like a heathen and expect to go to Heaven (Hebrews 10:26-29).

My question is, where is the cut-off? Let's say that I am serving God, love Jesus (I am saved according to John 3:16 and Romans 10:9-10), hate sin, and am living in communion with the Master. If I am driving in my car, a passenger asks me a question, and I lie to that person, for whatever reason, and then BAM, we get hit by a bus before I have a chance to take advantage of 1 John 19, am I going to Hell for that lie?

Do you know what I mean? I know that if I decided to leave my wife and kids and go live like the devil, by my actions I am basically giving back the gift of Salvation that God gave to me. But where is that cut-off point? After two sins, six sins, 100 sins? Or, do you suppose that it is an issue of the heart? As soon as my heart is to serve my own lusts and wants, and no longer serve Jesus' wants and plans, any sin past that is irrelevant? But if my heart is to please Him, and repent when I know that I sin, what if I miss or forget one?

Thank you again for any light you can shed on this.

my reply to John

How long is a piece of string? The answer is that, like every other Christian in the world, I simply do not know. Yes, we can usually pick up on the big things (as you pointed out) but no-one knows the cut-off point – which is exactly how it should be.

Watch some people try and circumvent rules with legalism, by bending rules until they are doing the opposite to what was intended, but still have not, technically, been broken.

As a young child I had a dog which knew she was not allowed to climb on my bed. However, she 'learnt' that, as long as she was standing on the floor, she technically wasn't 'on the bed'. That dog ended up lying on the bed next to me, but with one leg hanging over the side, a toe nail just touching the carpet. Technically she was not 'on the bed'...

If we had rules so rigid that we could interpret them in our own way we would go completely against what Jesus taught, and what the Father wants. By not having such rigid laws or rules, by not knowing that exact cut-off point, we must (or should) err on the side of safety.

I want to go to Heaven. Period. I don't want to get involved in grey areas of legality, so I try to ensure that I am living the type of life that God wants me to live. That I don't succeed 100 percent all of the time should not count against me because (a) I am human and live in a fallen world, and (b) my heart is for God, and God judges us on our heart, not on our accidental transgressions.

If I was using the fact that we live in a fallen world to 'temporarily' break an odd rule (lust after another woman, etc) and then 'repent' of that sin immediately afterwards, I would not be doing God's will and, yes, maybe I would be subject to losing my Salvation. People who think they can deliberately sin all week, and then go ask for forgiveness on Sunday, are deluding themselves (and, under their own rules, they'd better hope they die straight after church...).

Finally, you asked "But if my heart is to please Him, and repent when I know that I sin, what if I miss or forget one?" John, we can never know all of the sins we have committed throughout our life. As we mature as Christians, the Holy Spirit gradually reveals past sins to us so we have an opportunity to repent of them, and to resolve the issues around them. If our heart is truly for God then I don't believe our past, unremembered sins will be held against us. Could the criminal, who was crucified next to Jesus, have repented of all of his past sins? I don't think so – his Salvation was assured simply because he acknowledged that he was a sinner and that Christ was not.

Why not more Scriptural references?

an e-mail question from Richard

Your explanations are right-on.

I'm surprised that you have not included verses that deal with admonitions against deceivers (or anti-Christ) in most all of the epistles and even in Jesus' sayings about the Devil roaming the Earth looking for Christians whom he could devour.

Also in 1 Timothy 1:19-20, Paul deals with Hymenaeus and Alexander who shipwrecked their faith and whom he handed over to Satan.

my reply to Richard

You are right, there were many, many more Scriptures I could have used.

However, the article originally came from responses to my article 'The Key To Heaven', which was never meant as an anti-OSAS statement but a plea to place your faith first in your life. The number of pro-OSAS people, who wrote to me about 'The Key', prompted me to write the article because I found I was saying the same thing to each of them.

Essentially, they were using the same arguments and the same Scripture to 'prove' that I was wrong. Therefore, my anti-OSAS article is not pro-active but reactive – responding to the arguments put to me in favour of OSAS (which I felt were wrong).

I pray that those few words are of some help in understanding why I used the Scriptures in the way I did.

Faith in Salvation is like a marriage

an e-mail comment from Martin

Thanks, Graham, for your open, honest, healthy and encouraging article.

I've had people try convince me of once saved or not, and my belief is that we really don't have the right to debate certain things.

If I can explain that, in my marriage, I am very secure with my lovely wife and two kids – I don't waken up in the morning asking whether I am still married, or is my heart and attitude endangering me of marriage breakup when we have a fall out.

But, on the other hand, if I were to entertain certain thoughts, or pursue certain avenues (God forbid), I wouldn't like to test my marriage to its limits, however forgiving my wife would be.

And that is how, I believe, it is with God, our heavenly Father.

So, thanks again for your valuable balance, and may God bless you in your ministry.

Bashing The Bible
– or 'Scripture Bashing' –

I guess I have always been wrong. With my Protestant upbringing I never did agree with Catholics who venerate the mother of Jesus, but I **do** believe in the inerrancy of the Bible, which says 'blessed is the mother of Jesus', so who am I to argue!

Most Protestants will scratch their heads at this, and assume that I'm quoting from some special Catholic version of the Bible. I'm not! Reading from the NIV Bible in Luke 11:27, we find that it says:

> *As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you."*

Well, my quote was right! The Bible does say '*blessed is the mother of Jesus*'! Now let's read the next verse (v28):

> [Jesus] *replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."*

A totally different connotation has been placed on the quote when we place it in context. Rather than being a supporting text for the veneration of Mary, it is really the opposite.

"They select a few seemingly appropriate texts and use it as justification."

This is what I believe is wrong with some people who preach the Word (and I'm not just talking about preachers). Well intentioned people flip through their Strong's Concordance looking for supporting text for some viewpoint. They select a few seemingly appropriate texts – like the one I just mentioned – and use it as justification, as 'proof' of that viewpoint. However, many times they don't place that quote in its proper context.

I'm reminded of the story of the elephant and the blindmen. It is an ancient Hindu parable, but true never-the-less. Last century, **John Godfrey Saxe** turned it into an amusing poem which goes:

It was six men of Indostan
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the Elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind.

The First approached the Elephant
And, happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side,
At once began to bawl:
"God bless me, but the Elephant
Is very like a wall!"

The Second, feeling the tusk,
Cried, "Ho! what have we here
So very round and smooth and sharp?
To me 'tis very clear
This wonder of an Elephant
Is very like a spear!"

The Third approached the animal
And, happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands,

Thus boldly up he spake:
"I see," quoth he, "The Elephant
Is very like a snake!"

The Fourth reached out an eager hand,
And felt about the knee:
"What most the wondrous beast is like
Is very plain," quoth he;
"Tis clear enough the Elephant
Is very like a tree!"

The Fifth, who chanced to touch the ear,
Said, "Even the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most;
Deny the fact who can:
This marvel of an elephant
Is very like a fan!"

The Sixth no sooner had begun
About the beast to grope
Than, seizing on the swinging tail
That fell within his scope,
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a rope!"

And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong.
Though each was partly in the right,
They all were in the wrong!

by John Godfrey Saxe (1816 – 1887)
from the collection of "Best Loved Poems of The American People"

A shorter, more original version goes something like this:

Once there was a poor Persian village where all were blind.
One day a strange new creature called an elephant appeared at the village wall.
Since no one in the village had ever heard of an elephant, the three wisest of the blind villagers went out to discover what the new creature was like.
They all felt the creature.
The first blind sage felt the tail and said, "This elephant is like a rope!"
The second blind sage felt the leg and said, "No, it's like a tree!"
The third blind sage felt the side and said, "No, you fools. Like a wall!"

They were all correct from their limited point of view, but all were totally wrong in their description of an elephant.

Christians often do this with the Word. Rather than look at the whole book, they narrow it down to single verses – looking at the individual leaves on trees, and often not seeing the forest. It's like picking up a single piece in a jigsaw, and deducing the final image from that one tiny portion. The Bible is not just a series of verses but a complete manual.

The jigsaw pieces above tell you nothing about the 'big picture', in this case a photograph of Lake Wanaka in New Zealand.

The red square in this picture indicates the location of the jigsaw pieces. (images from a 'Globe Puzzles' jigsaw)

By selecting single concepts out of the Bible, and not looking at the Word in its entirety, we are abusing God's Word.

By carefully selecting individual verses, you can prove anything. What is God? Is He a vengeful, petty god who pouts when He doesn't get His own way, and punishes people who don't grovel at His feet? You could easily make that case by selecting verses and concepts out of the Word.

This is what a lot of non-Christians do – pick and choose the concepts they espouse. Oh, and Christians do it just as often – but in reverse. They ignore what doesn't suit, and only preach on verses which prove their point.

When reading the Word we must consider three things:

- who is speaking?
- who is being spoken to?
- what is being said?

For example, look at Genesis 3:1-4…

> ***1*** *Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"*
> ***2*** *The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,*
> ***3*** *but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"*
> ***4*** *"You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman.*

Who is speaking in verse 1? It is the Devil. Who is he speaking to? It is Eve. What was he saying (verse 4)? He was lying to her in temptation: "You will not surely die".

"It is therefore important to place all Scripture in its correct historical setting and to read it as it was meant to be read."

We do not want to apply what the Devil tempted Eve with, as applying to us. But, if we chose to deliberately abuse or manipulate the Word of God, we could make the (apparently) correct statement that: 'the Bible says that if you disobey God you will not die'!

It is therefore important to place all Scripture in its correct historical setting, and to read it as it was meant to be read. For example, the book of Romans was written to Jewish believers in Rome. It quotes the Old Testament, and talks about the Law and about 'works'.

Romans 11:6 says '*And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.*'

Many Jews considered that how they **behaved** and not what they **believed** was important, which was why Paul made this, and similar statements. But comments like this have led many Christians to deny that how we behave is important, calling any deliberate moderation of behaviour 'works' and therefore implying that Christians can behave in any way they like. The concept that Christians do not need to behave in certain ways is opposed in James 2:18-26 (emphasis mine) which says:

> ***18*** *But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."* ***Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do****.*
> ***19*** *You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder.*
> ***20*** *You foolish man,* ***do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?***
> ***21*** *Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?*
> ***22*** *You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.*
> ***23*** *And the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend.*
> ***24*** *You see that* ***a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone****.*
> ***25*** *In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?*
> ***26*** *As the body without the spirit is dead,* ***so faith without deeds is dead****.*

Other books of the New Testament are written to non-Jews, and therefore have a different emphasis. This is because the new Christian Gentiles had other problems.

The believers of Colosse had lost direction, and had started borrowing from other religions. This is now called Gnosticism. The book of Colossians was written specifically for these people.

The book of Galatians was written to refute the teachings of the Judaizers – early Jewish converts who believed that Gentiles must submit to the Jewish Law.

1 Thessalonians was written to encourage the church at Thessalonica, which was being persecuted. Part of that encouragement was to assure them of Christ's return. However, Paul had to write 2 Thessalonians to counter the belief that Jesus' return was imminent, as church members had stopped working and were waiting for the Second Coming.

Paul wrote the book of Titus to advise the Greek pastor in his responsibility in supervising the churches on the island of Crete.

"The individual books of the Bible were written to specific groups about specific things."

So each of these books were written for a specific purpose – and sometimes to a specific church or individual. While the instructions, encouragement and censoring can be used by others, they can give the wrong impression if the background to the books is not considered, especially when there is a concept presented which is not repeated elsewhere in the Word.

The Apostle Peter acknowledged that words could be misconstrued or deliberately distorted or abused. In 2 Peter 3:16 he wrote:

> *[Paul] writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.*

To an alcoholic you say "do not drink any alcohol under any circumstances at any time", but this does not necessarily mean that it should be imposed on people who do not have a problem with alcohol. The instruction is specific to the circumstances. Likewise, many individual books of the Bible were written to specific groups about specific things.

So, while we are placing the Word in context, while we are ensuring that we aren't just quoting verses to prove a viewpoint, and we are being careful of who is speaking, who is being spoken to, and what is being said, we must also be aware of the new Will of God which supplanted the Law of the Old Testament.

This new Covenant was fulfilled in Christ. In Luke 16:16 Jesus says:

> *"The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the Kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it."*

The end of John the Baptist's ministry was the dividing point between the old Covenant and the new – between Old Testament Law, and New Testament Grace.

"I try to ensure that I read 10 verses either side of a quote to place it fully in context."

All Christians must therefore be on their guard not to abuse the Word of God. They should be diligent in recognizing this abuse, and in not perpetrating this crime.

To help me I try to ensure that, I read 10 verses either side of a quote to place it fully in context (remember the 'Blessed is the mother of Jesus' comment).

I try to always think about who is saying what, and to whom. I also try and place teachings in their historical context.

Clearly it is important to place the entire Word of God in perspective. To select certain passages to the exclusion of the whole, to selectively use the Bible to prove a point, and to ignore the historical aspect of various books in the Bible, is therefore wrong.

"We must be more like the Bereans and examine Scripture to see if what we are being taught is true."

The Bible was not written to be understood by quoting snippets, but by reading the whole context. To do less is to potentially abuse the Word of God. In Acts 17:11 it says:

> *Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.*

We must be more like the Bereans, and examine Scripture to see if what we are being taught is true. Likewise in John 8:31 Jesus says:

> *"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

If you want to know the truth of the Scriptures – seek the real truth from the entire Bible, not just from selected passages.

Does God Ever Change His Mind?
– Calvin would turn in his grave! –

I doubt that any Christian would deny the fact that God, being omnipotent (all-powerful), omnipresent (ever-present) and omniscient (all-knowing), could change His mind if He wished, but the question is: Does God **ever** change His mind?

Anyone who is all-knowing must, by definition, know everything, and therefore should never need to change His mind because He knew what has, and what will, happen in any set of circumstances. His word is quite clear – He knew us before we were born (Jeremiah 1:5), so why would He ever need to change His mind?

To look at this properly we need to examine the subject of 'freewill'.

Freewill

Recently I read that 'the concept of freewill in the Christian church was over rated' implying that freewill was not the motivator of our faith. The article – from a well-known preacher – implied that everything was 'God ordained', and that He had our lives mapped out for us, so that freewill ceased to be an important aspect of our walk with the Lord.

If you take that concept one step further you will accept that God has chosen us. Jesus said in Matthew 22:14 that "For many are invited, but few are chosen". Therefore, according to that concept, some people are born to be saved, and others are born to lead a life of sin and be damned.

That Calvinistic concept does not sit well with me.

Almost the entire Bible – from Genesis to Jude anyway – talks about freewill, our choice of whether we believe (have faith) that there is a God, the freewill to worship Him, the freewill to try and live a holy life. By the same rules, we also have the freewill to turn away from God, to mock Him, to spurn Him.

Scriptures abound in this area. The first example in the Bible about freewill being exercised is the story of Adam and Eve and the Fall. Genesis 2:16-17 says:

> *And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."*

In Genesis 3:6 it says:

> *When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.*

Adam had exercised his freewill by refusing to accept God's command, and disobeyed Him by eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Results, of course, were disastrous for mankind!

Further examples of man exercising freewill – and directly opposing God's wishes – abound. In Genesis 4:6-10 we read the story of Cain and Abel:

> *Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."*
> *Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.*
> *Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?"*
> *"I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"*
> *The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground."*

So, Cain killed Abel – even though God warned him about sinning – and then Cain stupidly tried to fool God by saying "Am I my brother's keeper?" As if God didn't know what had happened! Still, by allowing man freewill, God allowed Cain to go against Him and kill Abel.

By offering various rules of life or examples of how we should live (particularly the parables of Jesus), we can choose to live in God's favour (by The Law as in the Old Testament, or by Grace as in the New Testament) or we can choose to live outside of God's favour. What are the Ten Commandments if not rules so that we may make a choice?

But why would God give us these choices? It would have been easier to have given us a loving dog-like devotion to Him. He could have commanded obedience – we would have been forced to live by His rules for us, in the same way we order the world in which we live. We could have been God's cattle.

But God didn't want blind obedience, He wanted our love, to be our loving Father, and for us to be His loving sons. But love does not live in a vacuum and, for God to give us the opportunity to love Him, He had to also give us the opportunity to turn away from Him. If there are no choices then there is no choice, and He had to give us the choice so that we had the opportunity to choose Him – otherwise how could we be sons and not cattle? Would you want a robot for a son? Would you want unquestioning obedience? If there was no questioning then there could be no love, and what father doesn't cherish the love of his son?

If God wanted children and not robots or domestic cattle, then He had to give those children freewill, the choice to love or not to love.

Therefore, I believe that the preacher who advocated that freewill was overrated was wrong. Too many people look at a verse, and not at the book. The Bible is interrelated, and it is dangerous to put your faith on one or two verses and not comprehend the whole.

Does God <u>ever</u> change His mind?

Let us return to the original proposition. Does God ever change His mind?

If God is not going to manipulate us, if He is going to offer us the opportunity to express our freewill, then He is at the mercy of that freewill. He can say to us "I would like you to donate a certain sum of money for missionary work" but, if we choose to ignore that 'small still voice', then God will get someone else to supply that need. Maybe you were His first choice, but your own inaction had led God to find someone else.

Do you ever wonder how many times God had a task for you, and you didn't listen carefully? Do you ever think of lost opportunities to help someone find the Lord? Have you ever thought that maybe you should speak to someone about Jesus, and then failed to do so, only to find out later that someone else led that person to the Lord?

God **must** change His mind because He is dealing with self-centred mortals, who often get so wrapped up in their own petty problems that they neglect to listen to Him. Because of our inability to be led, God must keep on finding alternatives to our lack of action.

God knows us individually, and will use us to the extent of our capabilities. We need to exercise our freewill so that we can be vessels that God can use.

Does God ever change His mind? If He does then it should be outlined in the Word. If we look at Genesis 6:6-7 we read:

> *The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the Earth, and His heart was filled with pain. So the LORD said, "I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the Earth – men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air – for I am grieved that I have made them."*

So apparently God DID change His mind – and that change of mind led to the Great Flood.

If we look at the story of the Golden Calf in Exodus 32, we read that God was so unhappy with his 'stiff necked people' that, in verse10, the Lord said to Moses:

"Now leave Me alone so that My anger may burn against them, and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation."

But Moses pleaded for his people, and finally God said to Moses (v14):

Then the LORD relented, and did not bring on his people the disaster He had threatened.

If we continue on with the story of the errant Israelites, we find that God is still unhappy with them. In Exodus 33:3 God says:

"Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way."

This is extraordinary! God is saying that He might not be able to control Himself because of the attitude of the Israelites. This is exactly what we have been looking at. God is, in some ways, at our mercy. The freewill He has given us as the tool so that we can love Him as sons and daughters, can also be turned against Him – it is a two-edged sword. With gifts like freewill comes responsibility. One cannot flourish without the other.

Look what's happening in our schools today. We tell children that they have 'rights', but don't balance that with the knowledge that, with those 'rights', comes 'responsibility' – one cannot successfully live without the other. God has given us the 'right' to our freewill, but we must temper that by being responsible.

Let's look at another Scripture where God has changed His mind. In 1 Samuel 15:35b it says:

And the LORD was grieved that He had made Saul king over Israel.

Again, man has let down God, and God grieved His original decision to make Saul Israel's king.

One of the most remarkable stories in the Bible can be found in the book of Jonah (Jonah 1:1-4):

The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before Me."
But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.
Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up.

With the ship threatened, Jonah told the crew to throw him overboard, to appease God and to save them. This they reluctantly did, and the raging sea grew calm (v15). Jonah, of course, was swallowed by a 'great fish' and stayed there for three days and nights. Finally, God 'commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land' (Jonah 2:10).

Now let's read from Jonah 3:1-4...

Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."
Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD, and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very important city – a visit required three days. On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned."

So Jonah finally obeyed the Lord, and told the Ninevites that they had only 40 days before their huge city of more than 120,000 people would be overturned. Reading further from Jonah 3:5-10...

The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust.
Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh:
"By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and, with compassion, turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish."

> *When God saw what they did, and how they turned from their evil ways, He had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction He had threatened.*

So the Ninevites repented of their 'evil ways and their violence' and God, again, changed His mind!

Obviously, how we behave – for good or for bad – determines how God treats us. God 'adjusts' His behaviour to us dependent on how we behave and what choices we make.

So our freewill allows us to go against God's wishes, and that makes God change His mind. He will often keep on reminding us so that, if we do start to listen, we can finally obey His command. If we don't, then God allows us that right to disobey, and we are ultimately the losers.

Many people would have heard the story of the drunk, passing a church, was captivated by the beautiful singing, staggered into the church, and was saved, never to touch the demon drink again. I have often wondered just how many churches God led that drunk to before he finally took the hint and went inside. Was it a 100? 200?

God works to a plan – part of which is outlined in Revelation – but for that plan to come into effect many things must be done.

God's Spreadsheet

God showed me that His plan is like a huge computer spreadsheet – a spreadsheet as large as this planet. The first column is the present, and the last column is the culmination of God's plan, but this spreadsheet works in reverse to other spreadsheets. Normally, you make a small correction to a cell in the first column – you could call it 'the here and now' – and the ripple effect amplifies that correction until the whole spreadsheet is upgraded with new data – invariably with a new conclusion.

However, God's spreadsheet works the other way. The first column – the here and now – is where all the action is, and I can envision a huge turmoil in that column. The next column exhibits less turmoil, and the next even less. This abating ripple effect goes on until we get to the end where there are no changes taking place. The last column remains unchanged, because that is God's ultimate plan for us. That plan, outlined in Revelation, has not changed, and never will.

Time is progressing – from left to right – towards the end of God's spreadsheet. The furthest left-hand column has more major corrections required to ensure that the last column remains unchanged. As the period between the 'here and now', and God's triumph over this world diminishes, so more and more corrections are required to keep everything 'on track'.

Yes, but not in regard to the Final Plan. That Final Plan He gave to us through the Apostle John is recorded in Revelation. That plan has not changed, the only thing which keeps constantly changing is how we listen to God, how we obey Him, and therefore how God can use us.

God has to constantly change His mind because He is dealing with us, His errant children! That is not a pleasant thought for a switched-on-for-Jesus, Bible-believing Christian.

An interesting thought. In Revelation 21:6 Jesus said: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End." He doesn't speak about His authority during man's reign on this Earth! The 'beginning and the end' but no mention of His absolute authority in the middle!!! He is there to help man but, ultimately, man must choose life or death, Jesus or Satan. With the promise for the future recorded in the Bible, I know where my focus must lie.

End Times

Is the future (often called the 'End Times') really pre-ordained? In Habakkuk 2:2-3 it says:

> *Then the LORD replied: "Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay."*

So the 'appointed time', as God told Habakkuk the prophet, 'will not prove false'. God set His plan into motion many thousands of years ago, and that plan is still unfolding today.

As we rush towards that 'appointed time' the Saints (committed believers) are being tested, and many are found to be wanting. The ones who don't listen carefully to God's word are likely to be left behind, to become so disillusioned with Christianity that they may turn away from God.

We can see that turmoil in the world around us even now. As we get nearer to the End Times, we will find that God will call on us even more. We will be given more and more tasks, as the final day of the Lord draws near.

If we listened perfectly and obeyed Him in all things there would never be a need for God to change His mind.

Finally

God has the ability to make-good our mistakes. If we just live under our own fleshly desires and powers, we will always fail. If we submit ourselves to God then we will receive the rewards He has promised us.

However, it is pleasing to know that, even if we don't always listen and obey 100 percent of the time, God can still use us in more ways than we think possible. Look how He blessed King David, even though David was a self-confessed sinner in many areas. Guess we don't have to be perfect, just repentant!

Just remember Hebrews 13:20-21 which says:

> *May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead, our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing His will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

A clarification:

It has been pointed out to me, quite rightly, that the Bible states that God does not change His mind. For example:

> *God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind.* (Numbers 23:19a).

While I agree with this statement completely, I think of it in terms of **God's Spreadsheet** (above). The end result may not change, but the path to that end result will always change due to the actions of others (ie our inability, or outright refusal, to listen to God and obey Him 100 percent).

Another analogy is this. You are driving your motor vehicle between two towns. The start and finish points of the journey (the two towns) does not change, but along the way you have to make small diversions – you avoid potholes in the road, maybe road workers have erected a temporary detour because of repairs, there is a slow vehicle that you overtake, or you pull over a little to let a faster vehicle pass, etc.

Along the way you speed up and slow down because of other road users, and the changing conditions on the road. Your actions are being controlled by other people, and by circumstances beyond your control.

Because of these changing conditions, no two voyages you take over that road will be identical. However, you finally get to your destination in spite of the detours, potholes, and the actions of other people (motorists, pedestrians, and cyclists).

God either orders us (pre-ordained blind obedience where we have no choice but to obey) or He allows us freewill. If He allows us freewill then He must allow for us to exercise that freewill – and that means constantly changing His mind, in much the same way we do when we drive between those two towns, making constant tiny changes to our path (caused by actions outside of our control).

The destination (as outlined in Revelation) does not change, but the path to that destination changes constantly.

New Wine In An Old Skin
– the problem of legalism in the church today –

There are over 600 laws in the Old Testament. Should Christians be obeying these old laws, or should we simply ignore them?

In Matthew 5:17, Jesus said: "*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.*"

Many church leaders quote these words in the context that part, if not all, of the Old Testament Law still applies today.

However, Jesus also said "*The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the Kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it.*" [Luke 16:16]

So does the Law still apply today, or are we under a New Covenant of Grace?

I believe that many people misinterpret the wording of Matthew 5:17 and the following two verses. Darby's New Translation says:

> *The passage has nothing to do with obeying the law. Nor is it here accomplishing a particular prophecy. He comes as the revealed completeness of God's mind, whatever the law and the prophets had pointed out. Verse 18 forbids the sense of obedience as not to be maintained, though 19 proves that he was to be condemned who, being under law, broke the commandments spoken of. But this is a consequence; Christ speaks of their authority. All was to be fulfilled in some way or another, not set aside.*

Matthew 5:17 therefore talks about fulfillment of Law and prophecy, not obedience, so there is no dispute between that verse and Luke 16:16.

To reinforce this, Jesus healed (worked) on the Sabbath [Luke 13:10-16] which, according to the church leaders of the day, was a direct violation of the Fourth Commandment: "*Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.*" [Exodus 20:8]

"*If Jesus could be so clear about the Old Testament Law, why then do we have a problem with it today? Why are we still yoked to the Laws of the Old Testament?*"

So what parts of the 10 Commandments (the moral law of the Old Testament) are sacrosanct today? What Commandments must we obey today?

When asked which was the greatest Commandment, Jesus answered by saying:

> *'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.* [Matthew 22:37-40]

Another area which can cause confusion is what we can eat or drink. When discussing 'clean' and 'unclean' foods, Jesus said:

> *What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean', but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him 'unclean'.* [Matthew 15:11]

If Jesus could be so clear about the Old Testament Law, why then do we have a problem with it today? Why are we still yoked to the Laws of the Old Testament?

In answering the questions asked by the church leaders of His day, Jesus said:

> *You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: "These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men."* [Matthew 15:7-9]

Living by Grace

One of the traits of being human is that we respond to boundaries set for us. We are more comfortable with a set of rigid laws than we are with the vague concept of Grace. Once we have a set of laws we know where we stand. We don't have to believe in them, just obey them.

Once you abolish law (either Biblical Law or man-made law) you must then try and live by a sense of morality. Imagine if the only road law we had was that we must not drive dangerously? Would we be responsible drivers, keeping to a safe speed, and being courteous to other road users? Alas, most probably wouldn't, but that is exactly what we are being asked to do as Christians.

Our book of rules has been thrown away under a concept of Grace, and we are asked to live a life which is considerate of others – whether they deserve it or not! Jesus told us to love our neighbours and place their interests before our own.

In Galatians 2:21 Paul said: "*I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the Law, Christ died for nothing!*"

Most of us have trouble with this concept of Grace, and seek to have rules placed on us to 'guide' us on the right path. Rules that we can live under, rules we can manipulate, rules we can stretch, rules that we can bend and, yes, even rules that we can break with the intention of repenting of them before God. No wonder Jesus said: "*I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!*" [Matthew 7:23]

Jesus also said: "*First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.*" [Matthew 23:26]

"*...we are left open to abuse by the very people who should be guiding and protecting us – our preachers and pastors*"

It isn't the Law He wants us to keep, but the Will of God. Jesus told us to live a 'clean life' (a vague concept at best, and open to cultural interpretation – which is exactly what Jesus meant it to be) and to love others, as we love God and love (respect) ourselves.

However, because we want guidelines and rules to live by (usually blurring the relationship between 'guidelines' and 'rules'), we are left open to abuse by the very people who should be guiding and protecting us – our preachers and pastors.

In our demand for guidance, we ask for more and more clarification, refining these guidelines and rules until they become locked-in-stone 'laws'. Many churches insist that their members not only abstain from alcohol, but also refrain from tea and coffee.

Apart from the fact that neither tea nor coffee are mentioned in the Bible, so there is no direct scriptural basis for demanding that church members refrain from drinking them, the ban on alcohol is even more absurd because alcohol is mentioned in the Bible, and we are even advised that a glass of wine each day is good for the stomach. When Jesus turned the water into wine, it was not the so-called 'new wine' which was non-alcoholic, but clearly wine which was quite potent.

The justification for these bans was that Paul told us to "*honour God with your body*" because "*your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit*" [1 Corinthians 6:19-20]. Abuse of your body is wrong, but is drinking tea or coffee abuse? What Paul was talking about was sexual immorality (read verse 18), not the food and drink we consume – or even the cigarettes we smoke!

Remembering that Paul told us we should not get drunk (Ephesians 5:18), the real problem is one of addiction. If you can smoke cigarettes, gamble, or drink alcohol, without becoming addicted to them, there should be no problem.

We should also remember that Paul said: "*So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*" [1 Corinthians 10:31]

Tithing

Another example of this is in the call for tithes within a church. Nowhere in the New Testament are Christians told to tithe. Let's look at this a little more closely.

For all of the wrong reasons, many church leaders have promoted the concept of tithing to ensure that their church has 'sufficient' income to pay its bills. Some church leaders even use emotional blackmail to support their viewpoint.

They make statements like: "The Bible says that you won't have food in your house unless you tithe, you can't out-give God [referring to Malachi 3:10]. If you don't tithe you are demonstrating your unbelief, your greed, and your lack of 'right' teaching."

How many church services have you attended where the offering is the predominant part of the proceedings? How many times is the call for 'tithes and offerings' longer that the pastor's sermon? We should not wonder why non-Christians or 'backslidden' Christians shake their heads and say: "They are only interested in my money!"

Sadly, in many cases that seems to be true...

One argument for tithing is that it precedes the Law because it was mention in Genesis. If that argument was valid, then everything mentioned before the Law was established (often called pre-Levitical) would still be relevant today – like animal sacrifice. Sacrifice still is valid today, but not the sacrifice of animals. We sacrifice ourselves to Christ by giving up our flesh (our fleshly desires).

In the same way, giving (making an offering) is just as relevant in a New Covenant church, as was giving in the pre-Leviticus church – just not the Law which talks of tithing.

Many churches confuse offerings with tithes – Grace with Law. Rather than trust God to supply their needs, they use selected passages from the Old Testament to 'persuade' their members to tithe.

Paul spoke clearly on this when he said:

> *For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.* [2 Corinthians 8:12]

If the willingness is there? What willingness is there if we are tithing because we are told that we must? Clearly, if we are not giving willingly, then the gift is not acceptable to God.

Paul also said:

> *Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.* [2 Corinthians 9:7]

Does this mean that we should not make a generous offering to the church? Of course not, the joy is in the giving, and we should be happy to give as generously as we can. Paul simply says that we should give cheerfully.

An offering is made under Grace (a free gift cheerfully given), and a tithe is made under Law (if you don't pay then God won't bless you).

If a church is truly trusting in God for its provision, then it does not need to demand that its members tithe. However, many churches do not trust God – they trust emotional blackmail and manipulation to ensure a sufficient income for their church, to pay for the buildings and its infrastructure, to 'pay the bills'.

"*Any church that relies on tithing for their income is not trusting God to supply their needs.*"

Church leaders might like to see a 'healthy' bottom line when the accounts are audited, but what has that to do with worshipping God, with carrying out the Great Commission?

Maybe they should remember Proverbs 3:5-6...

> *Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.*

As well as...

> *And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.* [Philippians 4:19]

Any church that relies on tithing for their income, is not trusting God to supply their needs.

The Bible says that God owns the cattle on a thousand hills (Psalm 50:10) which is simply saying that He is wealthy. If He is so rich, why should He need our pennies? God doesn't need our pennies, but what He does want from us is a generous heart. He doesn't want us to give grudgingly – which we are more likely to do if we are blackmailed into tithing – but to give joyfully.

Should that gift just be money? Of course not – that gift to God might be your labour and/or your time. Of course, churches cannot bank the labour you give, so some 'encourage' us to both work for God by serving, and also by giving financially.

I think that many church leaders will have a lot of explaining to do when they stand before the Judgement Seat.

Conclusion

The problem with Scripture is that it is interpreted by man, and often with ulterior motives. Man chooses what Scriptures to follow, and what Scriptures to ignore. While giving lip-service to following the Bible literally, many fundamentalist churches still select which passages to follow, and which passages to ignore.

The problem, of course, is that some Christian leaders do not balance what they teach with what the Bible says or implies. They select passages, specially passages of Law from the Old Testament, which suits their purposes, and then promotes those passages as if disobeying them would bring down the judgement of God on you.

"*They use fear as their main tool, but the Bible tells us that it is Satan who gives you a spirit of fear, not God (Romans 8:15).*"

This is often done for two reasons – the first is to exercise power over their congregation (read the excellent book, 'The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse' by David Johnson and Jeff Vanvonderen), and the second is to use their authority to ensure that their views, or interests, are met (as with tithing).

They use fear as their main tool, but the Bible tells us that it is Satan who gives you a spirit of fear, not God (Romans 8:15).

It is time that we told our church leaders that the ultimate authority is not them, but God, and He has already told us what He wants in the Bible. Manipulating Scripture to 'prove' what they want to prove, is wrong.

I would not want to be one of those church leaders when they have to stand before God to justify their actions. The end does not justify the means (read Romans 3:8).

In Matthew 15:8-9, Jesus says:

> *These people honour Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. They worship Me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.*

Are you living by God's rules, or those created by man?

Are You Hard Boiled, Or Soft & Runny?
– doctrines are like an egg shell –

Doctrine is the driving force behind many different Christian groups and sects. They read the Word, and highlight certain sections to focus their beliefs on, enjoying the 'truth' they see in that portion of the Gospel.

However, I see doctrine like the shell of an egg. Each Christian group has marked out its own territory, and staked its claim to that part of the truth. They defend their doctrine to the bitter end, attempting to prove to others that they, and they alone, have found the Truth in the Bible.

Alas, what many Christian groups miss is the core of that egg, the core teachings of Jesus, the yolk and white of the egg. This is the real substance, the reason for the shell.

Jesus highlighted two major things – to love one another and to forgive your enemy. In the Lord's Prayer, He said:

> *"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."* [Matthew 6:12]

A couple of verses later He repeated this by saying:

> *"For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."* [Matthew 6:14-15]

Could Jesus have said it any clearer than that? He did not say: 'forgive your enemy if he is sorry and apologizes to you'. No, Jesus told us simply to forgive – no strings, no 'ifs' and 'buts'. He also told us that, if we did not forgive our enemies, then God would not forgive us. Period.

Has someone hurt you and never been forgiven? Maybe you intend to forgive someone when it 'feels right', or when it doesn't hurt as much as it does now.

Forgiveness is not a feeling but an action. You need to forgive the drunk driver who kills your brother, or the rapist who attacks your daughter, now – even if they never show remorse.

Forgiveness may not heal them, but it will definitely heal you!

"*When our shell gets attacked it will break because doctrinal shells are brittle and do not flex.*"

It isn't a matter of waiting until the hurt has abated, it isn't a matter of waiting until you feel that it is 'right with God' for you to forgive them. **Forgiveness is an action of the head, not the heart.** Remember what Jesus said:

> *"...if you do **NOT** forgive men their sins, your Father will **NOT** forgive your sins."* (emphasis added)

God will <u>not</u> forgive you <u>unless</u> you forgive others? Scary stuff.

The other core teaching of Jesus, closely allied to forgiveness, was that we should love our neighbour. When asked which were the most important Commandments, Jesus said:

> *"'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."* [Matthew 22:37-40]

In Romans 13:9, while talking about how Christians should behave, Paul says:

> *The commandments, 'Do not commit adultery', 'Do not murder', 'Do not steal', 'Do not covet', and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'*

Do you love your neighbour? Do you love the kid who drives past your door at 3am with his stereo playing at full volume? Do you love the owner of the dog who allows it to mess on your lawn, and then doesn't clean it up? Forgiveness and love aren't just about the big things, but also about the little things too.

Maybe the only saving factor is that, while Jesus told us to love and forgive our neighbours, He didn't say that we had to like them...

Paul sums up nicely how Christians should behave. In Philippians 2:3-7 he said:

> *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*

"*Unfortunately, it seems to me the more emphatic some Christians are about their doctrines, the less they are about the core teachings of Jesus.*"

Now back to our egg and the title of this article.

Unless we have the core teachings of Jesus firmly in our heart we are like a raw egg – we have a hard outer shell, but the inside is soft and runny. When our shell gets attacked – as it most certainly will, Satan will see to that – it will break because doctrinal shells are brittle, and do not flex.

When that happens the soft inner parts of the egg – the yolk and white of our core beliefs – will simply run away, and we will be left holding the shards of an empty shell. Our faith will be as shattered as our doctrines. I believe that this is a major factor in the high number of people who, after accepting Jesus as their Saviour, backslide and fall away.

However, if we concentrate on the core teachings of Jesus, we will be like a hard-boiled egg. You can remove the shell from a hard-boiled egg but the real substance, the yolk and white, will remain intact. To Christians who concentrate on the core teachings of Jesus, the hard outer doctrinal shell ceases to be of any significant importance.

Unfortunately, it seems to me the more emphatic some Christians are about their doctrines, the less they are about the core teachings of Jesus.

Those doctrinally-motivated Christians might have staked a claim to a small portion of the eggshell of faith but, unless they are hard-boiled believers in the core truths that Jesus taught, their doctrine is just a brittle shard.

If we have the core teachings deep in our heart and in our actions, then nothing else really matters because we have opened ourselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Remember, Jesus teaches forgiveness and love, while Satan teaches intolerance and hate.

Which one are **you** following?

The Truth Will Set You Free!
– the Father, the Son and... the Holy Tarantula??? –

We glibly use the expression 'the truth will set you free' but this may not be correct in all circumstances. It isn't just the truth that sets you free, it is knowing the truth, and then applying it, that sets you free.

The truth is there at all times – whether or not we recognize it – but unless we know the truth, and apply it, truth itself is powerless.

For example, after September 11, 2001 the world knew that terrorists could, and would, turn jumbo jets into bombs. The truth had existed during the years of planning, but the public wasn't aware of it. Therefore it didn't serve any good, and it certainly didn't help the occupants of the Twin Towers, or the passengers in the planes.

It is knowing the truth, and then applying it, that sets us free.

Jesus said in John 8:31 and 32 that...

> *"If you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

To understand the truth of the Gospels you must:

(a) believe that Jesus is the son of God, the Messiah, the Saviour; and

(b) hold to the teachings of Jesus so that you become His followers – more than just a student who learns about His teachings, but a follower who emulates Him in all that you do.

In verse 34, Jesus tells us 'everyone who sins is a slave to sin' so, if you are a slave, then you are not free. In verse 36 He says that if He sets you free, then you will be free indeed.

Our freedom therefore requires that if we believe that Jesus is our Saviour, and hold to His teachings in all things, then His truth really will set us free.

"one of the biggest problems in the church today ... is that we are lazy"

One of the biggest problems in the church today – and probably in the church over the past 2,000 years – is that we are lazy. We sit back and listen the teachings of Jesus as interpreted by someone else. Maybe that person is accurate, maybe he is inaccurate, but we will never know unless we emulate the Bereans (Acts 17:11) and check the Scriptures of everything we are taught.

It is obvious that not everything in the Bible is black or white – there are many grey areas which, in my opinion, are there deliberately.

You can believe in Eternal Security (often called 'Once saved, Always Saved') or you can believe in Conditional Security, where you can walk away from God and lose your inheritance. There are arguments both for and against both doctrines, and one could be excused for accepting the teachings of one viewpoint and believe, with faith, that the opposing viewpoint was wrong.

Other areas are more clear cut, but some teachers work on the principle that, if it doesn't cost you your Salvation, then getting involved in discussion or debate about these other areas is pointless.

I disagree.

How many times have I heard our Counsellor, the third part of the Trinity, called the Holy Ghost instead of the Holy Spirit. Does it really matter if He is called a ghost or a spirit? I believe it does. Both words have very specific meanings – meanings which are not the same. A ghost is 'the apparition of a deceased person', and a spirit means 'breath', or 'soul'.

"...we could also call Him the Holy Tarantula…"

As our Counsellor is not 'the apparition of a dead person', calling Him the Holy Ghost is not only wrong, but an insult. If it is OK to call Him the Holy Ghost, then we could also call Him the Holy Tarantula, or something equally silly. If a ghost is the same as a spirit, then why isn't a tarantula the same as a spirit?

English is English, and words have specific meanings so that we can accurately communicate with each other. Laziness in not choosing the correct word can lead to a speaker's words being misinterpreted.

The argument that 'it doesn't matter, we all know what we mean' is false, and quite dangerous. This is how heresies get started.

Too much of the Christian faith is based on laziness or mis-interpretation. How many times have you heard someone quote Scripture out of context to prove a point. Is this 'truth'? Of course not, Scripture can only be interpreted in its correct context and cultural setting.

How many times have we heard someone preach on, say, the Ten Commandments, and extol us to obey them? Is that Scriptural? Are we bound by the Ten Commandments from Exodus 20? If we are, then where does it say that we should only obey those Commandments, and not all 613 Laws of the Old Testament? Where does one draw the line and say: Christians should obey these Laws, but they don't have to obey those Laws?

When asked which was the greatest Commandment, Jesus answered by saying:

> *'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.* [Matthew 22:37-40]

While those two Commandments can be seen as a summation of almost all of the Ten Commandments, these are the Commandments that Christians are told we must obey. Jesus did not say we should obey all 10, He simply gave us two.

This was the same quandary put to the Apostles as they started to reach Gentiles, or non-Jews. What part of the old Law should a non-Jewish Christian obey? In Acts 15:19-20 James says:

> *"It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead, we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals, and from blood."*

"…instead of having to obey all 613 Laws of the Old Testament, we are given just six…"

So, instead of having to obey all 613 Laws of the Old Testament, we are given just six – two from Jesus and four from the Apostles:

- love God;
- love your neighbour;

- don't eat food offered to idols;
- avoid sexual immorality;
- don't eat meat from strangled animals; and
- don't eat meat with blood in it.

Therefore, there are over 600 Laws which we do NOT have to obey – like having to tithe, like avoiding the meat of 'unclean' animals (like pigs, or shellfish), like circumcising baby boys, like reciting the Shema (the centrepiece of all morning and evening Jewish prayer services), like sacrificing animals, like holding the Sabbath sacred, etc.

Any Gentile Christian preacher who demands that we obey all, or some, of the 613 Levitical Laws of the Old Testament – except those outlined above – is teaching heresy, even though it may, or may not, affect someone's Salvation.

If they are not teaching the truth of the Word they are not setting the captives free.

A Christian may freely choose to obey or follow any of the old Laws (tithing, Sabbath worship, etc) but that is his or her choice, and has nothing to do with legalism or the old Law – it is a freewill choice to follow those old rules.

For example, many Christians support tithing, not because they must but because it is a good guide on what to give to the Church. To do so out of compunction is wrong, to do so out of a desire to give generously is good.

In 2 Corinthians 9:7, Paul said:

> *"Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."*

"…many church ministries [rely] on the blackmail of tithing"

Tithing, as part of the old Law, is giving 'under compulsion', but giving generously as a 'cheerful giver' is what God wants from us. It isn't even about the money but about (a) being generous (something Christians are told to do) and (b) supporting the ministry so that it can reach out to all peoples in all nations.

Unfortunately, many church ministries are relying on the blackmail of tithing to ensure they have sufficient income to pay their (self-imposed) bills, and are not 'trusting in the Lord' (Proverbs 3:5) to supply their needs.

The Bible is full of truths, but you must be careful that the 'truth' you follow is a Biblical truth and not an interpretation from man, especially a man with an agenda. Once you know what the Bible actually says, then you can apply that truth to your life.

Therefore, it is knowing the truth, and then applying it, that sets you free. To find the truth in the Word, remember the Bereans and study your Bible. Check everything you are taught, and make sure that this is really what the Bible says.

Is the NIV Bible Heretical?

Some Christians have questioned my use of the NIV Bible. One person said to me that "we have the true and infallible word of God in the Authorized or KJV, and the use of any other version is heretical".

Let me set the record straight – the KJV is, like every other version of the Bible, simply a translation. It has errors, as do all versions, both ancient and modern. Translations are just that, translations – none are the original.

Unfortunately, we do not have original manuscripts of the various books of the New Testament, but we do have fragments of very early manuscripts (back to about 110AD) plus many complete texts from around 200AD. In most cases, the earlier the manuscript the more accurate it should be, though there are some early manuscripts, from specific regions, which were clearly flawed. We don't know if this was deliberate (to make them fit an existing heresy) or just poor copying. Prior to the Nicean Council of 325AD, there were numerous heresies within the church. Some say there still are…

We also have quotes from New Testament writings, found in many letters sent between Christians from about 50AD. I understand that you can read the entire New Testament from the quotes collected up to 200AD! Not only were there quotes directly from the New Testament writings, but there were many references to events in the New Testament – for example the 'solar eclipse' which occurred when Jesus died on the cross.

According to Dr Dale Robbins (author of 'Why So Many Bible Translations?'):

> *The KJV New Testament (and all editions since Tyndale) was compiled primarily from the Byzantine family of manuscripts (AD 500 – 1000) frequently referred to as the Textus Receptus. But many of the newer translations were produced using a composite of later discoveries of other manuscripts and fragments dating from an earlier period. Among such are the 'Alexandrian Family' manuscripts (AD 200 – 400) which include the three oldest 'The Codex Alexandrius', the 'Codex Vaticanus' and the 'Codex Sinaiticus', all which were major contributors to most Bible versions after the King James version.*

Which manuscripts (usually abbreviated to MSS) are the 'right' ones? Probably none of them, because none are original. However, the Textus Receptus MSS does have some problems from a translator's point of view, according to Bible linguist Charles V Taylor (who wrote 'Bibles With Holes?', 'The Oldest Science Book In The World', 'Did God Really?', 'The Creator Is Coming', 'Churches Aglow Down The Ages', et al plus numerous articles). Dr Taylor points out that, when dealing with Holy works (of any faith), copyists tend to **add** explanation rather than **remove** words. This is because the words are considered Holy, and therefore must never be removed (cf Rev 22:19), though adding words of explanation was often considered acceptable.

"Words, phrases and concepts which meant one thing to a 17th Century reader often mean something totally different to a 20th Century reader."

If you check most of the verses 'missing' from the NIV, and other modern Bibles, you will find, in nearly every case, they were an explanation of the previous verse – which makes those verses more likely to have been added by a copyist, rather than deleted by a translator. This makes the 'Alexandrian Family' of manuscripts more likely to be closer to the original than the 'Textus Receptus' (Byzantine Family) manuscripts, which is why they have been chosen by the later translators. So, when someone tells me that the KJV has 790,704 words and the NIV has 'only' 726,606 words, then I feel even **more** confident in my choice of Bible translation.

But simply looking at the total number of words is meaningless, because the language between the KJV and the NIV are so different – one is 17th Century English, and the other is 20th Century American English. Words, phrases and concepts, which meant one thing to a 17th Century reader, often mean something totally different to a 20th Century reader. What does 'suffer little children to come unto me' mean to you? Do you want the children to only come to Jesus if they are in pain or suffering? Or maybe they come to Jesus so they will suffer? I don't think so. The KJV says in Luke 18:16...

> *Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not for of such is the kingdom of God.*

While the NIV says:

> *Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.*

Which renders the verse 'best'? At least the NIV makes sense to a modern reader!

But modern Bibles can be just as 'wrong' as older versions. In John 2:1 the NIV says:

> *On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there...*

and the KJV says:

> *And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there...*

But what does this mean? Did it take Jesus three days to walk to Cana? If so, from where? The translation is 'wrong' in a modern English sense because, in many cultures (especially Greek), days of the week are numbered so 'the third day' simply means 'Tuesday' (the first day of the week is Sunday). A more sensible modern translation would be 'On Tuesday a wedding took place...'

"This is the dilemma of all translators – especially if they are translating Holy books."

So the act of translation itself can cause problems. When the original says 'on the third day' should we accept that, and translate it literally, or should we render it so that it makes the same sense to us as it did to the 1st and 2nd Century audience it was written for? This is the dilemma of all translators – especially if they are translating Holy books.

In French, the adjective follows the noun rather than precedes it, so that the phrase 'the green door' in English becomes 'the door green' in French (*la porte verte*). If you were translating either from or to French, which would you use? Would you say that the phrase must be rendered exactly (ie word-for-word) or would you agree with most translators, and say that it must be rendered into its equivalent phraseology for the target audience. And if you did translate word-for-word, would the resultant translation be 'more accurate'? Alas, no. In fact, in many cases there are no direct translations. Therefore, equivalent English phrases must be substituted so that the correct tense and concept is portrayed.

The translation from ancient Greek (especially when the New Testament ancient Greek had an Aramaic accent!) to modern English is therefore not just a matter of taking one word and translating that single word into English – you must try and render a phrase into a correct rendition of what the original writer meant when he or she wrote it **as if they were writing in modern English**. Not so easy...

But there are even more potential problems when an English translation of ancient Greek text has to be also rendered into a rhyming style, as was the KJV (at the time of writing most common people could not read, so the KJV was designed to be read from the pulpit). This adds another barrier to accurate translation because the translator must translate into prose. What liberties must be taken with the original for this to be accomplished?

"I wonder if the Christians who used the Geneva Bible of 1560 complained loudly about the 'heretical new KJV Bible' when it was first introduced?"

The problems with translations are compounded because, if the publisher of a modern translation wants his version to be accepted by people who have been reading an older version, he or she has to make it compatible with that version. What translation errors have there been since Tyndale's Bible (1534), faithfully reproduced so that existing readers are not alienated by an apparent change in doctrine. While the NIV had the KJV to work from, so the KJV had previous versions which it had to be compatible with. Going back to Dr Robbins:

"After Tyndale, several other famous Bibles were produced in the 16th century. The Cloverdale Bible in 1535, Matthew's Bible in 1537, The Great Bible in 1539, The Geneva Bible in 1560 (the first to use chapters, verses, and the italicization of added words), and the Bishops Bible in 1568."

In fact, some 80 percent of the KJV was copied from the Geneva Bible. It is clear, then, that the KJV really was 'just another English translation'; excellent when it was written (especially considering the limited number of manuscripts available at that time) but still 'just a translation' – just like the NIV and other modern Bibles... I wonder if the Christians who used the Geneva Bible of 1560 complained loudly about the 'heretical new KJV Bible' when it was first introduced?

How about the foreign language versions of the Bible? Are they, too, somehow inferior because they aren't the KJV? Should a Chinese-speaking Christian be forced to read the KJV because it is 'the only true and infallible Word of God'?

So which version is right? As Christians, let us not get into dispute over this because I really don't believe it is important. What is important are the core teachings in the Word, and these do not change between any of the major versions of the Bible (not counting the New World Translation, a Jehovah Witness version which is deliberately flawed to follow the teachings of that cult).

"With the recent publication of several different books vilifying modern translations, asserting that they were borne out of conspiratorial motives, a word should be mentioned about this concocted theory."
(Daniel B. Wallace)

Finally, if you think that the NIV, and other modern versions, are somehow the work of Satan (or non-Christian humanists) then I urge you to read the Addendum to the excellent article 'Why I Do Not Think the King James Bible Is the Best Translation Available Today' by Daniel B. Wallace, Ph.D (Professor of New Testament Studies, Dallas Theological Seminary).

This says (paragraph breaks added, and emphasis mine):

One further point is necessary. With the recent publication of several different books vilifying modern translations, asserting that they were borne out of conspiratorial motives, a word should be mentioned about this concocted theory.

First, many of these books are written by people who have little or no knowledge of Greek or Hebrew, and are, further, a great distortion of the facts. I have read books on textual criticism for more than a quarter of a century, but never have I seen such illogic, out-of-context quotations, and downright deceptions about the situation as in these recent books.

Second, although it is often asserted that heretics produced some of the New Testament MSS we now have in our possession, ***there is only one group of MSS known to be produced by heretics: certain Byzantine MSS of the book of Revelation. This is significant because the Byzantine text stands behind the KJV!*** *These MSS formed part of a mystery cult textbook used by various early cults. But KJV advocates constantly make the charge that the earliest MSS (the Alexandrian MSS) were produced by heretics. The sole basis they have for this charge is that certain readings in these MSS are disagreeable to them!*

Third, when one examines the variations between the Greek text behind the KJV (the Textus Receptus) and the Greek text behind modern translations, it is discovered that ***the vast majority of variations are so trivial as to not even be translatable*** *(the most common is the moveable nu, which is akin to the difference between 'who' and 'whom'!).*

Fourth, when one compares the number of variations that are found in the various MSS with the actual variations between the Textus Receptus and the best Greek witnesses, it is found that these two are remarkably similar. There are over 400,000 textual variants among NT MSS. But the differences between the Textus Receptus and texts based on the best Greek witnesses number about 5,000 – and most of these are untranslatable differences! In other words, over 98 percent of the time, the Textus Receptus and the standard critical editions agree.

> ***Those who vilify the modern translations and the Greek texts behind them have evidently never really investigated the data.*** *Their appeals are based largely on emotion, not evidence. As such, they do an injustice to historic Christianity as well as to the men who stood behind the King James Bible. These scholars, who admitted that their work was provisional and not final (as can be seen by their preface and by their more than 8000 marginal notes indicating alternate renderings), would wholeheartedly welcome the great finds in MSS that have occurred in the past one hundred and fifty years.*

The KJV, like other translations, is a superb document. However, it is not the only version, and it is not necessarily the 'best' version. If it suits you, great, but it might not suit other people. If the doctrine stated in the more modern translations, including the NIV, is identical to the doctrine in the KJV, then what is the problem?

As Christians we should not get involved in petty disputes which do not honour the Father and do, in fact, honour Satan. Let us remember who the Enemy is, and it isn't fellow Christians who might, or might not, have identical doctrine to you. God honours our hearts, not our doctrines!

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, dwell in you and in your house forever.

About the KJV

There are some KJV-only supporters who condemn the NIV and other modern versions as 'perversions' and 'satanic'. Please note that I love the KJV, as I love other translations of the Word, and the comments below are an attempt to answer some of the KJV-only claims.

Forgetting any other argument, the KJV was written over 400 years ago (quite a bit more because most of it is copied directly from earlier versions). During that period, many words have changed in the English language, and there are over 800 words used in the KJV which now have a different meaning. Many of them are clearly archaic, and therefore do not cause much problem (except when preachers assign different meanings to the same words!), however some appear to be the same as modern words, but have a totally different meaning today from when they were written.

According to Rick Norris in his excellent book, **The Unbound Scriptures**, these words include:

- ***nephews*** (1 Tim 5:4) used to mean *grandchildren* or *descendants*
- ***carriages*** (Acts 21:15) used to mean *baggage*
- ***let*** (2 Thess 2:7; Rom 1:13) used to mean *hinder*
- ***prevent*** (1 Thess 4:15) used to mean *precede*
- ***turtle*** (Jer 8:7) was used for *turtledove*
- ***rank*** (Gen 41:5) used to mean *strong* or *healthy*
- ***leasing*** (Ps 5:6) used to mean *lies*
- ***health*** (Ps 42:11) used to mean *salvation*, *deliverance* or *help*
- ***rid*** (Ps 144:7) used to mean *deliver* or *rescue*
- ***take no thought*** (Matt 6:25) used to mean *not troubled* or *anxious*
- ***hard*** (Acts 18:7) used to mean *close* or *near*
- ***discover*** (Micah 1:6) used to mean *uncover* or *lay bare*
- ***replenish*** (Gen 1:28; Gen 9:1) used to mean *fill*, where the modern verb means *to refill*

'Even' (a word very often introduced by the translators and thus italicized) is mostly used in the sense of 'namely' or 'that is'.

Check these passages with an understanding of the true meaning of these words! Many passages mean something different to what we think they mean today. Quite possibly someone could look at, say, Genesis 1:28 in the KJV where it says 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the Earth' and make the argument, based on today's usage of the word 'replenish', that the Earth had been previously inhabited and that a civilization had preceded Adam's. Knowing that 'replenish' in old English simply means 'fill' in today's English, that argument is clearly not correct.

I have never rejected the KJV, or any other translation (except the JW's New World Translation) but I do acknowledge that the KJV does have some major errors in it.

For example, Exodus 20:13 (The Ten Commandments) says **Thou shalt not kill**. If this was accurate then God would be going against His word (something He never does!) when He sent out the Israelites to conquer their neighbours and kill them. Of course, the true word should be 'murder' (unlawful killing) not simply 'kill' (taking a person's life). How many people have refused to go to war for religious reasons by quoting this incorrect rendition from the KJV?

Another problem is the expression 'Holy Ghost' instead of 'Holy Spirit'. Even in 1611 this was incorrect because a ghost ('the apparition of a deceased person') is completely different to a spirit (from the Latin *Spiritus*, meaning 'breath' but also 'soul') – and always has been! We do not have a ghost as our Counsellor but the Holy Spirit!

In 1 Corinthians 11:24, the KJV (and a few other translations, like Young's, Amplified, The Message & Webster's) state that the body of Jesus was 'broken'. The KJV says:

> *And when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, "Take, eat: this is My body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of Me."* (emphasis added)

This is in contrast to the NIV, NLT, NASB, New American Bible, ASV, RSV, Darby, etc that omit the word 'broken'. The NIV says:

> *…and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me."*

While modern readers may not consider the inclusion, or exclusion, of the word 'broken' to be important, it was to the Jews who were living under Levitical Law – sacrifices must be blemish free (bones were not broken when they were sacrificed).

Jesus was an offering for our sins and, to be accepted, that sacrifice must conform to the old Law (see Leviticus 4:1 to 5:13 for information about the 'sin offering', and 22:17-30 for 'unacceptable sacrifices').

Apart from that, virtually every version of the KJV is different from each other! There is no 'one correct KJV' because all have errors. Like other translations, it is not error-free. Only the original manuscripts, when written, were error free.

On the Wikipedia page about the 'KJV-only Movement', under the heading 'Arguments against KJV Only' it makes the comment:

> *If the King James Version was truly divinely inspired, there would be no mistakes. This is not the case, however; in Acts 12:4, the KJV says 'Easter' where the Jewish holiday of Passover is being referred to. Further, in Deuteronomy 8:9 the King James Version has Moses describing the Promised Land as having hills where 'thou mayest dig brass'. Brass is an artificial alloy of copper and zinc and cannot be found in nature. The correct translation should be 'copper'.*

Some people claim that they stand by the KJV of 1611, but don't realize that the original KJV – and all versions up to about 1780 – included the Apocrypha, an additional 14 'non canonical' books (Wikipedia says it was omitted from around 1827). The KJV was written to appease the Catholics and was, to all intents and purposes, a Catholic Bible. Even though King James was head of the Church of England, his heart was with the Catholics and he ordered the KJV to be created because the most popular English-language Bible of his day, the Geneva Bible, included margin notes that stated that the Pope was the anti-Christ. At that time, the Church of England (C of E) was an Anglican version of the Roman Catholic faith, and many leading C of E clerics ,at that time, wanted the Pope to be the head of the C of E church in England. It is believed that even King James wanted to hand over his duties as head of the English church to the Pope!

One further comment – most historical sources indicate that King James, the man who ordered the KJV, was a homosexual. I wonder if the indirect language of the KJV in regard to homosexuality was the translators protecting themselves by not being too harsh about this practice. If you compare NIV and KJV references to homosexuality (1 Cor 6:9, et al) you will see that the NIV is much more direct in its denunciation of this practice – which goes against the notion that a Lesbian was able to influence the translation of the NIV towards homosexuality.

For more information about King James the man, see the section 'Personal relationships' at the Wikipedia article about King James I of England which says, in part: 'The love the King showed men was amorously conveyed as if he had mistaken their sex and thought them ladies, which I have seen Somerset and Buckingham labour to resemble in the effeminateness of their dressings...'

I pray that the information above will be of some help to people who are struggling under the yoke of a KJV-only church, and who wish to study God's Word in a more modern, and dare I say, more accurate translation.

If you choose to read the KJV as your only Bible, great. That is your choice and I support it 100 percent. However, any condemnation against other, legitimate translations is wrong and harmful to the Christian faith, and ignores the evidence.

‘Omissions’ From The NIV Bible
– a look at 17 ‘missing’ verses –

The NIV (New International Version) Bible has often been accused of being ‘incomplete’, and having missing verses.

Some proponents of earlier Bibles (specially the KJV – King James Version, also known as the Authorized Version or AV) have attacked the NIV Bible for these omissions.

I maintain that rather than these missing verses being omissions from the original manuscripts, the opposite is true – the extra verses in the KJV have often been added by the copyists to expound upon a point, or to clarify a point. Many people think that it is OK to add explanation to Holy text, it is just wrong to remove words from Holy text.

The following verses are not in the NIV and other modern translations. The KJV was based off the Byzantine family of manuscripts (500 to 1000 AD), which were commonly called the Textus Receptus manuscripts. The NIV (sometimes called the ‘Nasty Incomplete Version’ by people who think that anything not included must have been deliberately removed as part of some conspiracy theory) was mainly based off the earlier ‘Alexandrian Family’ manuscripts (200 to 400 AD).

If, as I contend, these verses were added to the Byzantine family of manuscripts, they would probably have been added after 500 AD. Considering the different geographical and cultural changes in the 400 years from 100 to 500 AD, it is not surprising that some additions were made to clarify differences for these later, non-Jewish Christians.

The following are a list of ‘omissions’ in the NIV is provided in tables. At the top of the table is the verse in question. In the left-hand column is the KJV text (including sufficient verses to put it in to context. In the right-hand column are the same verses from the NIV. Underneath those two columns are my comments which might, or might not, be accurate or reasonable (you be the judge).

Matthew 17:21

KJV	NIV
16 And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him. 17 Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me. 18 And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour. 19 Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? 20 And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. 21 Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.	16 I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him.” 17 “O unbelieving and perverse generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me.” 18 Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed from that moment. 19 Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?” 20 He replied, “Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” 21

Comments about this ‘omission’:

Verse 21 in the KJV was most likely added by a copyist to qualify the explanation that Jesus gave as to why He could cast out the demon and the Apostles could not. Whereas Jesus simply said they needed faith, the copyist obviously didn’t think that this was enough and added the comment that you needed prayer and fasting as well. Reading the text, in context, clearly shows that this verse was added later and was most unlikely to have been in the original. Verse 22 starts a new teaching so verse 21 was the final verse in what Jesus was saying about faith. Typically, added verses are placed at the end of a discourse, not in the middle of one.

Matthew 18:11

KJV	NIV
[Jesus said] Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. 6 But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. 7 Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! 8 Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. 9 And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire. 10 Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. 11 For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.	[Jesus said] "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 "And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. 6 But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. 7 "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come! 8 If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. 9 And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell. 10 "See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. 11

Comments about this 'omission':

It is clear from reading the context of this passage that verse 11 has been added by a copyist. It does not strictly follow on from what precedes it and there is a new, unrelated passage which follows it. It could have been an earlier copyist's margin note, called a 'qere', which was later added into the text. For more about 'qeres' see the notes at the bottom of this article.

Matthew 23:14

KJV	NIV
12 And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted. 13 But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. 14 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. 15 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.	12 For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. 13 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. 14 15 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are. 16 "Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone

16 Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!	swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.'

Comments about this 'omission':

The addition of verse 14 is not as straight forward as the addition of some other verses but I get the impression that the copyist who added this verse had his own agenda regarding the taking of widow's houses (his mother?) and about Pharisees being involved in long prayers. He finishes this verse with a curse but the verse is certainly written in the general style of the verses either side of it. I still consider this to be an addition if for no other reason than it was not included in earlier manuscripts (the NIV is based off manuscripts older than the ones used for the KJV).

Mark 7:16

KJV	NIV
[Jesus said] Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. 10 For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: 11 But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. 12 And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; 13 Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye. 14 And when he had called all the people unto him, he said unto them, Hearken unto me every one of you, and understand: 15 There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man. 16 If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.	[Jesus said] "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! 10 For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' 11 But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift devoted to God), 12 then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. 13 Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that." 14 Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. 15 Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean.'" 16

Comments about this 'omission':

The inclusion of verse 16 in the KJV is interesting and is one of eight times those words are used in the KJV (New Testament). The other seven times are also included in the NIV so there is no reason to omit that verse deliberately, unless it was not included in the original manuscripts used by the translators of the NIV. Again, this is a verse I can see a copyist adding, but not an NIV translator deliberately omitting.

Mark 9:44 & 46

KJV	NIV
39 But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. 40 For he that is not against us is on our part. 41 For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward. 42 And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones	39 "Do not stop him," Jesus said. "No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, 40 for whoever is not against us is for us. 41 I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward. 42 "And if anyone causes one of these little ones who

that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea. 43 And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: 44 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. 45 And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: 46 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. 47 And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: 48 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.	believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck. 43 If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. 44 45 And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. 46 47 And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, 48 where "'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'

Comments about this 'omission':

As with Mark 7:16 (above), this is a case of a copyist adding an already used phrase – possibly to increase emphasis but it could have simply been an error. Certainly, there was no reason why the NIV translators would deliberately remove it because it is used in verse 48. This is a quote from Isaiah 66:24 (the last verse in this book) which says:

"*And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind.*" [NIV]

"*And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcases of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.*" [KJV]

Mark 11:26

KJV	NIV
22 And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. 23 For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. 24 Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. 25 And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. 26 But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.	22 "Have faith in God," Jesus answered. 23 "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. 24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. 25 And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins." 26

Comments about this 'omission':

This verse is a copy of what Jesus taught in the Lord's Prayer and was most likely added to give clarification to what Mark said (chronologically, the Gospel of Mark preceded that of Matthew but a copyist would have both with him). It is also virtually identical to Matthew 6:15 which says "*But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins*" [NIV] and "*But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses*" [KJV]. Again, this is a situation where there was no reason for the translators of the NIV to deliberately remove the verse and, because of the later date of the manuscripts used by the KJV translators, was more likely added than omitted.

Mark 15:28

KJV	NIV
22 And they bring him unto the place Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, The place of a skull. 23 And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not. 24 And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take. 25 And it was the third hour, and they crucified him. 26 And the superscription of his accusation was written over, THE KING OF THE JEWS. 27 And with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left. 28 And the Scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors. 29 And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, 30 Save thyself, and come down from the cross.	22 They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull). 23 Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. 24 And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get. 25 It was the third hour when they crucified him. 26 The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS. 27 They crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left. 28 29 Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, 30 come down from the cross and save yourself!"

Comments about this 'omission':

To me this is clearly an addition to the original to show that Scripture had been fulfilled. This reference is from Isaiah 53:12 – '*Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.*'

Luke 17:36

KJV	NIV
32 Remember Lot's wife. 33 Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it. 34 I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. 35 Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. 36 Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. 37 And they answered and said unto him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.	32 Remember Lot's wife! 33 Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. 34 I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. 35 Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left." 36 37 "Where, Lord?" they asked. He replied, "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather."

Comments about this 'omission':

This addition is simply a clarification of the previous verse which talks of two women. Obviously the copyist wanted to point out that it wasn't just women who would be taken in the Rapture of the Second Coming, but men too. This comment and reference is not included with any of the other Gospels. Maybe this was an early example of someone trying to be 'politically correct' and more gender neutral.

Luke 23:17

KJV	NIV

12 And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves. 13 And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, 14 Said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people: and, behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him: 15 No, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him. 16 I will therefore chastise him, and release him. 17 (For of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast.) 18 And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas: 19 (Who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison.) 20 Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them. 21 But they cried, saying, Crucify him, crucify him.	12 That day Herod and Pilate became friends – before this they had been enemies. 13 Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, 14 and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. 15 Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. 16 Therefore, I will punish him and then release him." 17 18 With one voice they cried out, "Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!" 19 (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.) 20 Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. 21 But they kept shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

Comments about this 'omission':

This is a later clarification for people who would not have known of this old custom. It would have been unnecessary for the readers of the First Century (most of whom would have been of Jewish birth or upbringing) but as Christianity spread throughout the Gentiles over the following centuries, a custom like this would have been unknown to most of them. I find it interesting that it is in brackets as a clarification, the same way that verse 19 was a clarification and was in brackets. This makes me think that maybe the inclusion of verse 19 in both the NIV and the KJV was an even earlier addition.

John 5:3b & 4

KJV	NIV
1 After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 2 Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. 3 In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. 4 For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had. 5 And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years.	5:1 Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. 2 Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. 3 Here a great number of disabled people used to lie – the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. 4 5 One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.

Comments about this 'omission':

This is a clarification of a later verse (7b) which says "*I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred.*" I can only assume that this would have been known to the original First Century Jewish readers but a later copyist decided that it needed clarification for later Gentile Christians (see **Luke 23:17** comments above)

Acts 8:37

KJV	NIV
34 And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. 36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? 37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. 38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.	34 The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" 35 Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. 36 As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" 37 38 And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.

Comments about this 'omission':

This addition is less clear (to me) than most of the others. If you read the text in both the KJV and the NIV (above) you will see that it flows perfectly well in the NIV but it would not flow as well in the KJV if that verse was removed. I personally believe it was simply another clarification so that the message "this is how you can get saved" was reinforced throughout the Word. The same basic information is repeated throughout the NIV so this could not be a case of the translators deliberately trying to suppress something.

Acts 15:34

KJV	NIV
30 So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: 31 Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation. 32 And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them. 33 And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles. 34 Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still. 35 Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.	30 The men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. 31 The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message. 32 Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers. 33 After spending some time there, they were sent off by the brothers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them. 34 35 But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord.

Comments about this 'omission':

This verse was added to clarify what happened to Silas because it is implied in the previous verse that he left Antioch with Judas but later on (Acts 16:40) Paul leaves Antioch with Silas. Either way, it adds or takes away nothing of significance from the message of the Word.

Acts 24:7

KJV	NIV
1 And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul. 2 And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to	1 Five days later the high priest Ananias went down to Caesarea with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, and they brought their charges against Paul before the governor. 2 When Paul was called in, Tertullus presented his case

accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, 3 We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. 4 Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words. 5 For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes: 6 Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law. 7 But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands, 8 Commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him. 9 And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so.	before Felix: "We have enjoyed a long period of peace under you, and your foresight has brought about reforms in this nation. 3 Everywhere and in every way, most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude. 4 But in order not to weary you further, I would request that you be kind enough to hear us briefly. 5 "We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect 6 and even tried to desecrate the temple; so we seized him. 7 8 By examining him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him." 9 The Jews joined in the accusation, asserting that these things were true.

Comments about this 'omission':

Verse 7 is, I believe, simply an addition to make the Jewish authorities look bad (or worse than they really were) by having them defame the Roman officer who was charged with escorting Paul to Rome and who was careful to treat Paul with civility. If the copyist's agenda was to make the Jewish authorities look as bad as possible then the addition of this verse would be understandable. If not, there was no reason to include the verse in the later manuscripts.

Acts 28:29

KJV	NIV
25 And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, 26 Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: 27 For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. 28 Be it known therefore unto you, that the Salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it. 29 And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves. 30 And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, 31 Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.	25 They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet: 26 "'Go to this people and say, "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving." 27 For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.' 28 "Therefore I want you to know that God's Salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!" 29 30 For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. 31 Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Comments about this 'omission':

It appears that verse 29 is simply an explanation as to what happened next because it wasn't explained in the original text. Clearly this is a case of an addition rather than an omission. It certainly doesn't add, or detract, from

the message of the Bible and would not have been deliberately omitted by the NIV translators for quasi political reasons.

Romans 16:24

KJV	NIV
21 Timotheus my workfellow, and Lucius, and Jason, and Sosipater, my kinsmen, salute you. 22 I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord. 23 Gaius mine host, and of the whole church, saluteth you. Erastus the chamberlain of the city saluteth you, and Quartus a brother. 24 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. 25 Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, 26 But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: 27 To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.	21 Timothy, my fellow worker, sends his greetings to you, as do Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, my relatives. 22 I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord. 23 Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings. Erastus, who is the city's director of public works, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings. 24 25 Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, 26 but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him – 27 to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

Comments about this 'omission':

Part of a series of personal greetings which started at Chapter 16, verse 1 and continues through to verse 27 (the end of this book). It adds, or subtracts, nothing from the original or from the message of the Word but can be commonly found throughout Paul's writing. It could have been added by a copyist to emphasize a typical Pauline benediction, of which there are dozens of similar ones found in the NIV (for example, see 2 Thessalonians 3:18, Romans 1:7, Romans 15:33, etc). This is another case where the "omission" has no valid reason if it was supposed to be done to detract from what Paul said (lessen the power of the Word). Why remove this one and leave all the others!

1 John 5:7

KJV	NIV
5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? 6 This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. 7 For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. 8 And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.	5 Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. 6 This is the one who came by water and blood – Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. 7 For there are three that testify: 8 the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.

Comments about this 'omission':

It seems to me that verse 7 in the NIV is the same as the start of verse 8 in the KJV (in blue) so I agree that verse 7, as it appears in the KJV, is not included in the NIV. That said, it appears that verses 7 and 8 in the NIV, and verse 8 in the KJV, are saying much the same as the KJV verse 7 – that 'missing' verse 7 is simply a

paraphrase of verse 8 as related to this planet. I believe that this verse in the KJV has been added to further support the doctrine of the Trinity as it does not appear in any Greek manuscript before the 16th Century! While I support the Trinity, I do not believe that verses should be added simply to support that belief (in Romans 3:8, Paul says that the end does not justify the means).

I trust you have found the above information of both value and interest. The comments are my personal opinion and, as such, may be flawed. I pray you will bear this in mind when you critique this work. Remember, there (should be) no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).

As mentioned in the notes on the Matthew 18:11 'omission', many of the later additions to the text could have been 'qeres' (literally, 'hooks') – margin notes that were later added to the main text. As you can imagine, a copyist's margin notes, within a manuscript, could be mistaken for the actual text of the manuscript – specially as both were hand-written. A subsequent copyist could then assume that the margin notes were part of the original text, and replicate them.

Two Visions Of The Coming Revival
– a personal revelation –

During May 2009, at a prayer group where we were praying for revival, God gave me two visions. The group was comprised mainly of intercessors, and I was there because it was held in my home, not because I have any claims to be an intercessor.

I was reminded of Acts 2:17 which says: 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.'

As I am not a young man now (though, that might be a subjective observation) maybe what I saw a was dream and not a vision. You be the judge.

Vision 1

The fire of revival starts as the refiner's fire, cleansing recipients prior to the revival starting. I saw this fire as a column, with a tornado surrounding it, sucking people into the refiner's fire within.

While it seems contradictory in the natural (fire and tornado together), this is exactly what God is doing – drawing us to Him and cleansing us in preparation for the coming revival.

Vision 2

I saw a blacksmith's forge, with the Holy Spirit pumping at the bellows to make the fire roaring hot.

As Christians, we are the iron, placed into the forge to be heated, cleansed, and turned into tools and weapons for the coming revival.

When I first saw the vision, I saw horseshoes being created at the forge, which surprised me because I expected to see swords dripping fire coming from the forge, not a humble item like a horseshoe. However, the Holy Spirit showed me that horseshoes were needed for the warhorses, and they were as important as the swords to the success of the coming battle.

He showed me that when God uses us in His works, we must be prepared to be, and do, whatever He needs from us. The humble horseshoes on the warhorses are, to Him, as important as the swords, spears and the other more obvious weapons of war.

He said we must be prepared to take our role in the coming revival in whatever capacity God deems best for us – and that might not be at the cutting edge, but as part of the support crew. Every aspect of a battlefield is as important as every other. Without the support crew who supply the food, the warriors cannot go into battle; without the armourers, the warriors are unprotected; without the shoes, the horses can stumble.

To us, glory goes to the goal kicker, the striker, the guy who hits a home run – and the warrior facing up to a fierce enemy. To God, the glory goes to every obedient member of the team, from the humblest member doing a mundane job, to the front-line strike force.

We must do what God calls us to do, not what we deem best for us. We might see a front-line glory job as being where we should be, but God may require something different from us. Alternatively, we may be a person who craves anonymity, who wants to be in the background doing one of those mundane (but necessary) jobs, but God might want us to be in the front-line, battling the enemy head-on.

We must be prepared to get out of our own comfort zone, to become the weapons and tools that God wants of us.

Suggested Reading

The following are just some of the books I recommend. They are listed alphabetically.

Christian Non-Fiction:

'7 Reasons To Believe' by Kevin Simington
'Bibles with Holes' by Charles V Taylor
'Finding The Real Jesus' by Lee Strobel
'God's Error Free Word' by Charles V Taylor
'Have a Little Faith' by Mitch Albom
'In Six Days' edited by John F Ashton PhD
'Making Sense of the Bible' by Kevin Simington
'Miracles from Heaven' by Christy Wilson Beam
'More Than A Carpenter' by Josh McDowell
'No More Monkey Business: Evolution In Crisis' by Kevin Simington
'Patterns of Evidence: The Exodus' by Timothy P Mahoney & Steven Law
'Prison To Praise' by Merlin Carothers
'The Believer's Conditional Security' by Daniel D Corner
'The Boy Who Came Back From Heaven' by Kevin & Alex Malarkey
'The Gospel of the Kingdom' by David Seccombe
'The King of God's Kingdom: A Solution to the Puzzle of Jesus' by David Seccombe
'The Mystery Of The Last Supper' by Colin J Humphreys
'The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict' by Josh McDowell
'The Screwtape Letters' by C S Lewis
'The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse' by David Johnson and Jeff VanVonderen
'The Unbound Scriptures: A Review Of KJV-only Claims' by Rick Norris
'What's So Amazing About Grace' by Philip Yancey
'Who Moved the Stone?' by Frank Morison

Christian Fiction:

'Ollie Chandler Collection' (3 novels: Deadline, Dominion, Deception) by Randy Alcorn
'The Caleb Collection' (2 novels: Blessed Child, Man Called Blessed) by Ted Dekker
'The Complete Circle Series' (4 novels: Black, Red, White, Green) by Ted Dekker
'The Illuminati' by Larry Burkett
'The Space Trilogy' (3 novels: Out Of The Silent Planet, Perelanda, That Hideous Strength) by C S Lewis
'The Third Millennium' and 'The Fourth Millennium' by Paul Mier
'This Present Darkness' and 'Piercing the Darkness' by Frank Peretti

If you enjoy general fiction books, Christian authors Ted Dekker and Kevin Simington both have extensive collections, and I highly recommend them.

If you have found this book to be of value, and wish to bless the author, donations are accepted through PayPal to Graham Pockett (paypal.me/GrahamPockett) or use the QR code below: